Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State
EducationUSA.state.gov

If You Want to Study in the United States: Undergraduate Study

# If You Want to Study in the United States

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY

1

Editor: Coleen Gatehouse
Cover Design: Rolando Ribera

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# If You Want to Study in the United States

Booklet 1
Undergraduate Study

# Acknowledgments

This four-booklet series, published under the title *If You Want to Study in the United States*, was produced by the U.S. Department of State's Educational Information and Resources Branch. The booklets are also available on the Internet at http://www.educationusa.state.gov. This current edition is an updated version of the original project coordinated by Evelyn Levinson in 2000-2001. The update project was administered by the College Board Office of International Education through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State. Carol Blythe and Janine Farhat thank Coleen Gatehouse for her organization and editing and Rolando Ribera for his cover design.

The Department of State wishes to thank the following individuals from around the world who contributed their time, expertise, and talents to this series:

Kathleen Alam
Ellen Badger
Martin Bennett
Louise Cook
Juleann Fallgatter
Julia Findlay
Judy Freudenberger
Coleen Gatehouse
Nancy Gong
Joanna Graham
Sharon Grodzielanek
Sandarshi Gunawardena
Linda Heaney
Lisa Henderling
Lia Hutton
Judith Irwin
Michelle Johnson
Rekha Kalle
Nancy Keteku
Ann Kuhlman
Gaston Lacombe
Carolyn Lantz
Maria Lesser
Evelyn Levinson
Amy Lezberg
Diana Lopez
Ted Mashima
Michael McCarry
Beryl Meiron
Martyn J. Miller
Terhi Molsa
Barbara Nichols
Roberta Paola
Dawn Piacentino
Rohayma Rateb
Laura R. Ruskaup
Sohair Saad
Jaylene Sarrasino
Bethany Shaw
Sharon Snyder
Karen Solinski
Peter Storandt
Rosalie Targonski
James Vaseleck
JoAnn deArmas Wallace
Harold Woodley

# Preface

*Undergraduate Study* is one of a series of four introductory booklets produced by the U.S. Department of State to provide objective and practical advice to prospective international students and scholars on studying in the United States. The booklets may be downloaded from the Internet at www.educationusa.state.gov, and print copies are available at EducationUSA advising centers worldwide. To find the center nearest you, contact a U.S. embassy or consulate, or consult the list available on the EducationUSA website.

The four booklets cover the following areas:

## *Undergraduate Study*

How to choose and apply to U.S. bachelor's and associate degree programs, plus information on technical and vocational educational opportunities in the United States.

## *Graduate and Professional Study and Research*

How to research and apply to U.S. master's, doctoral degree, and postdoctoral programs, plus information on certification and licensing procedures for professionals who wish to further their education or practice in the United States.

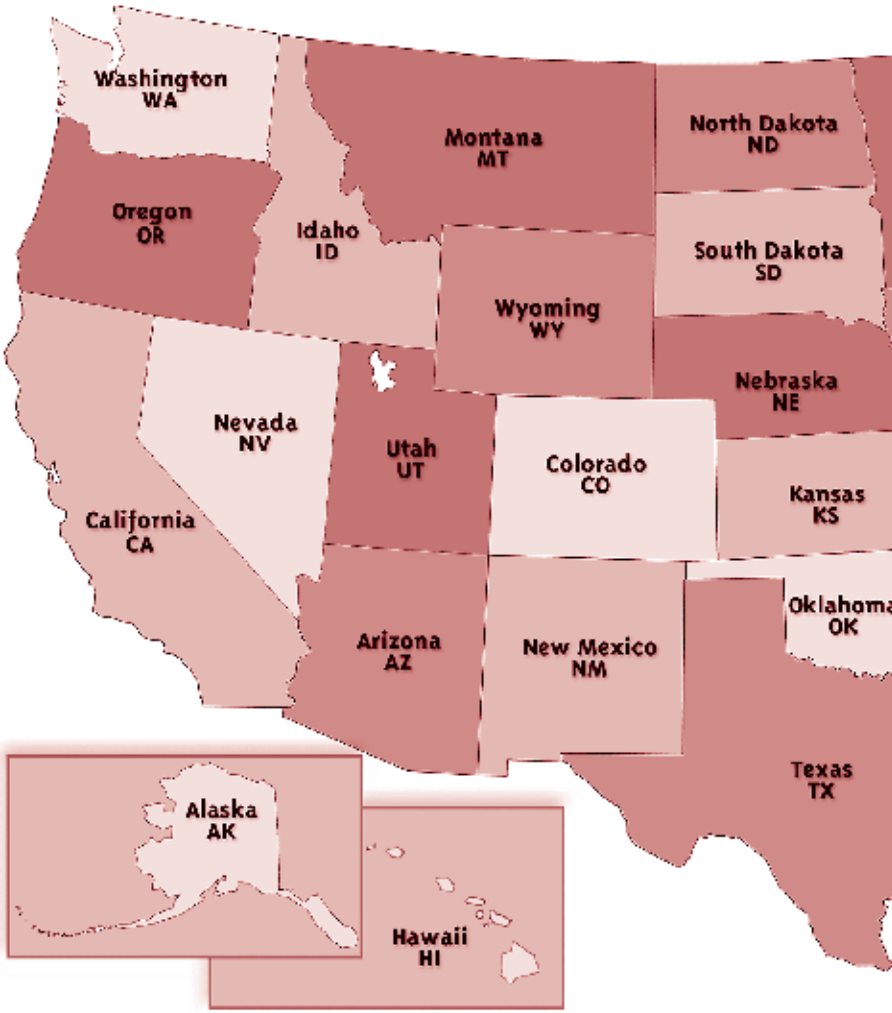
## *Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation*

Information on opportunities to study in the United States for up to one year, plus an overview of studying toward a degree, diploma, or certificate from outside the United States through distance education programs. The booklet also includes detailed information on accreditation of U.S. higher education institutions.

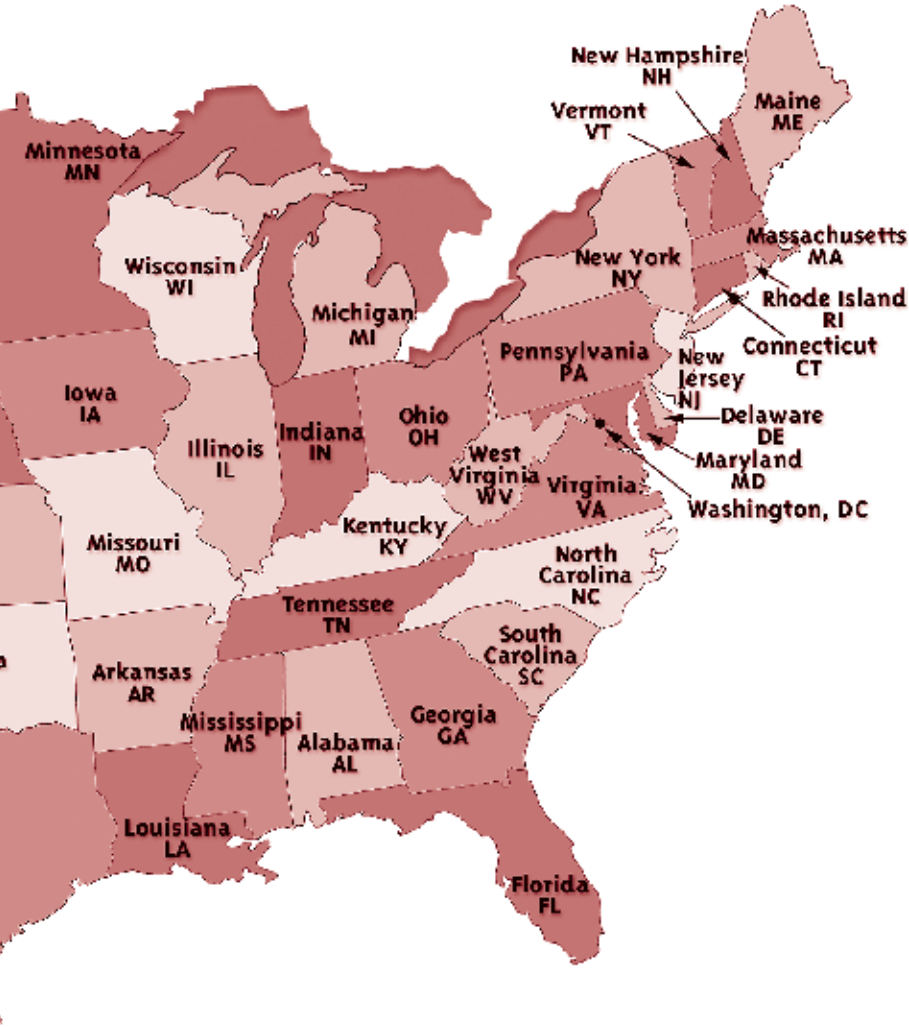
## *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*

Help with planning your move to the United States after you have been accepted to a U.S. university or college. This booklet provides advice on applying for a visa, moving to the United States, and what to expect when you arrive on campus.

# The United Sta



# tes of America



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# Introduction

Thousands of colleges and universities offer undergraduate degree programs in the United States. This vast choice means there are programs available to meet everyone's needs, but how can you find the best program for you? This booklet aims to give you not only the knowledge you need to make the right choices, but also the confidence to prepare successful applications.

## Why Study in the United States?

Here are just a few of the reasons why more than 600,000 international students from around the world are furthering their education in the United States:

**Quality:** U.S. colleges are known worldwide for the quality of their facilities, resources, and faculty. Accreditation systems ensure that institutions continue to maintain these standards. Chapters 1 and 2 explain the U.S. system of undergraduate education. Chapter 4 highlights the type of accreditation you should look for when applying to U.S. colleges.

**Choice:** The U.S. education system is unrivaled in the choice it offers in types of institutions, academic and social environments, entry requirements, degree programs, and subjects in which to specialize. Chapters 4 and 5 explain the entry requirements and guide you through the process of choosing the right college or university for you.

**Diversity:** You can find a mix of people from all different backgrounds and all corners of the globe on U.S. campuses; more than 600,000 international students come to study in the United States each year.

**Value:** As an investment in your future, a U.S. degree offers excellent value for the money. A wide range of tuition fees and living costs, plus some financial help from colleges, make study in the United States affordable for thousands of students. Chapters 6 and 7 offer information and advice on the costs and financing of your U.S. education.

**Flexibility:** Students at U.S. universities and colleges may choose from many courses within their college or university and have the option to move from one institution to another. Completing the first two years of a degree at one institution, usually a community college, and then moving to another, is very common. Chapters 3 and 10 describe community colleges and explain the transfer system.

This booklet will also help you prepare successful college applications (chapters 8 and 9) and apply for a visa (chapter 11). Chapter 12 explains what to expect when you arrive in the United States. A glossary at the end of the book explains some of the words and phrases you will come across frequently when applying to study in the United States.

## EducationUSA Advising Centers

> *"The advising center was a great resource in the process of choosing my school. My counselor helped me every step of the way, from choosing the right institution and taking the TOEFL to applying for financial aid and understanding culture shock."*
>
> — Political science and international studies student from the Dominican Republic

Choosing the best schools for you and preparing successful applications will require commitment and careful planning on your part, but in almost every country there are specialized advisers who understand your needs and can help you. Information and advice on study in the United States are available to you from a network of nearly 450 EducationUSA advising centers worldwide. Directories, guides, college catalogs, and admissions test information are available at the centers. You can also meet trained educational advisers who want to help you and your family with the process of choosing and applying to U.S. colleges and universities. Some centers also run events like college fairs or seminars. Introductory information in the form of video or group presentations, website access, and independent resource libraries is available free of charge, but payment may be required at some centers for additional services.

All EducationUSA advising centers are supported by the U.S. Department of State, with the goal of providing objective information on the range of study opportunities available in the United States; however, the names of the centers and the organizations that run them vary from country to country. To locate the center nearest you, contact your closest U.S. embassy or consulate, or consult the list available on the EducationUSA website (http://www.educationusa.state.gov).

Good luck with your applications!

# U.S. Undergraduate Education

Education in the United States will almost certainly be different from the system offered in your country. This chapter gives you an introduction to the degrees available in the United States, the different types of institutions, and some key terms and ideas you will come across if you want to study at a U.S. university or college.

## Colleges, Universities, and Institutes: The Distinction

Degree-granting institutions in the United States can be called by any of these terms, and colleges and institutes are in no way inferior to universities. As a general rule, colleges tend to be smaller and usually offer only undergraduate degrees, while universities also offer graduate degrees. The words "school," "college," and "university" will be used interchangeably throughout this booklet. An institute usually specializes in degree programs in a group of closely related subject areas, so you will likely come across degree programs offered at institutes of technology, institutes of fashion, and institutes of art and design, among others.

Within each college or university you will find schools, such as the school of arts and sciences or the school of business. Each school is responsible for the degree programs offered by the college or university in that area of study.

## Bachelor's and Associate Degrees

The bachelor's degree typically takes four years to complete. The associate degree usually takes two years to complete. Associate degree programs may be "terminal" programs, which lead to specific careers upon graduation, or "transfer" programs, which correspond to the first two years of a bachelor's degree. Under the latter option students may transfer into the third year of a four-year bachelor's degree program. Associate degree programs are offered at two-year colleges known as junior or community colleges (see below). Four-year colleges and universities offer bachelor's degree programs, with a small number also offering associate degree programs.

## The Liberal Arts Philosophy

U.S. undergraduate education is based on the concept of "liberal arts," with the goal of providing a well-rounded academic education that develops students' verbal, written, and reasoning skills. Students at a liberal arts college, or at a university with a strong liberal arts program, begin their degree study by taking classes in a wide variety of courses in the arts, humanities, languages, and the social and physical sciences. They then choose a subject in which to specialize (called a major) and take about 25 to 50 percent of their classes in the major area. Even those who do not follow a liberal arts program and instead plan to major in a specialized subject like engineering are usually required to take about 25 percent of their classes in humanities and social sciences to complement their studies. Similarly, a student who wants to complete a major in history may be required to take some classes in mathematics and the sciences.

## Professional Education

Professional (career-oriented) education is included within the U.S. university system. Large universities tend to be comprised of a college of arts and sciences and several professional schools focusing on fields such as business, agriculture, medicine, law, journalism, public policy, technology, or international affairs. More information on professional education can be found in Booklet Two of this series, *Graduate and Professional Study and Research*.

## State Universities

State universities are founded and subsidized by U.S. state governments (for example, California, Michigan, or Texas) to provide low-cost education to residents of those states. They may also be called public universities to distinguish them from private institutions. Some include the words "state university" in their title or include a regional element (for example, East Carolina University or Western Connecticut State University). State universities tend to be very large, with enrollments of 20,000 or more students, and generally admit a wider range of students than private universities. State university tuition costs are generally lower than those of private universities. Also, in-state residents (those who live and pay taxes in that particular state) pay much lower tuition than out-of-state residents. International students, as well as those from other states, are usually considered out-of-state residents and therefore do not benefit from reduced tuition at state institutions. In addition, international students may have to fulfill higher admission requirements than in-state residents. A small number of institutions offer in-state tuition to international students through sister-city/country arrangements or because they have special agreements with institutions in other countries. Check with your EducationUSA adviser to see if your country, or an institution in your country, has such agreements with partners in the United States.

## Private Universities

Private institutions are funded by a combination of endowments, tuition fees, research grants, and gifts from their alumni. Tuition fees tend to be higher at private universities than at state universities, but there is no distinction made between state and non-state residents. Colleges with a religious affiliation and single-sex colleges are private. In general, private universities have enrollments of fewer than 20,000 students, and private colleges may have 2,000 or fewer students on their campuses.

## Community Colleges

Community colleges provide two-year associate degree programs, usually called the associate of arts (AA) or associate of science (AAS) degrees, as well as excellent technical and vocational programs. As the name suggests, community colleges are community-based institutions with close links to secondary schools, community groups, and

employers, and many U.S. community college students live close to campus with their families. Community colleges can be public or private institutions and are sometimes called junior colleges or two-year colleges. Tuition costs are often lower at two-year than at four-year institutions, and many community colleges have agreements to allow students on transfer programs to move easily into the third year of a bachelor's degree at the local state university.

## Technical and Vocational Colleges

These institutions specialize in preparing students for entry into, or promotion within, the professional world. They offer certificate and other short-term programs that train students in the theory behind a specific vocation or technology, as well as in how to work with the technology. Programs usually last two years or fewer. There are several thousand technical and vocational colleges across the United States. Further information on short-term study opportunities in the United States is provided in Booklet Three of this series, *Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation.*

## Distance Education

Distance education is a popular way to study for anything from a short-term professional course to a graduate degree in the United States. Under the distance education model, students do not attend classes in a classroom on campus; instead, classes are delivered "from a distance" through the use of technologies such as the Internet, satellite television, video conferencing, and other means of electronic delivery.

For international students this means they can study for a U.S. degree without leaving their home country, though they may have to go to the United States for short periods of face-to-face contact and study on the campus. Studying for a degree using distance education requires students to be self-disciplined, committed, and able to work on their own. If you are considering distance education, you should thoroughly research the quality of the program, the accreditation of the institution in the United States, and its recognition in your home country to be sure that this option is appropriate for your future goals. Further information on distance education is provided in Booklet Three of this series, *Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation.*

## Non-degree Study at a U.S. College

Do you want to study at a U.S. college or university, but not for a full degree? Perhaps you want to experience life on a U.S. campus, while improving your knowledge of certain subjects. This is certainly a useful addition to your educational experience, and U.S. colleges welcome such students. Write to colleges, explain your situation, and request information on applying for "special student" or "non-degree student" status. See Booklet Three of this series for more information on short-term study opportunities in the United States, and refer to chapter 8 in this booklet for further details on requesting information from U.S. universities.

## Useful Websites

U.S. Network for Education Information
http://www.ed.gov/NLE/USNEI/toc.html

Distance Education and Training Council
http://www.detc.org

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Website for International Students
http://www.aaccinternational.org

# The U.S. Bachelor's Degree

One of the most attractive features of the bachelor's degree program in the United States is that it is highly flexible. You can usually choose from a wide variety of courses and create your own unique program of study. The degree is awarded after you complete a specified number of credits, which are usually completed in four years of full-time study. The first year is called the freshman year; the second is called sophomore; the third, junior; and the fourth, senior. You may read that students in the United States often take longer than four years to complete their degrees. This may be because they change majors and need to accumulate enough credits in the new major field to earn their degree. It could also be because they take less than a full-time course load per term for academic, personal, or financial reasons. International students, however, cannot study part-time and must maintain full-time status.

## Academic Calendar

The academic year will be slightly different for each university or college but normally

runs from early September to the end of May. It may be divided into two terms of 16-18 weeks called semesters. Alternatively, the university may have "quarters" or "trimesters," which are about 10-12 weeks in length. In addition, universities very often provide six- to eight-week summer terms. These are optional, and students attend if they wish to get through their degree faster, to decrease their course load during the regular terms, or to make up for courses not completed successfully during the regular academic year. There are at least two main holidays during the academic year: a two- to four-week break in December/January and a one-week "spring break" between early March and mid-April.

## The Credit System

Students at U.S. universities complete their degrees when they have accumulated a certain number of "credits" (sometimes the terms "semester/quarter hours" or "units" are used instead) for the courses they have taken. Every course earns a set number of credits, and each institution has its own requirements for the number of credits needed to graduate. Your academic adviser will help you plan your course schedule for the academic year.

## Degree Courses

The individual courses that make up the degree program can be divided into the following types:

- **Core courses:** These provide the foundation of the degree program and are required of all students. Students take a variety of courses in mathematics, English, humanities, physical sciences, and social sciences. Some colleges require students to take many core courses, while other schools require only a few.

- **Major courses:** A major is the subject in which a student chooses to concentrate. Most students choose one major, but many also pursue multiple majors. Your major courses represent one-quarter to one-half of the total number of courses required to complete a degree.

- **Minor courses:** A minor is a subject in which a student may choose to take the second greatest concentration of courses. The number of courses required for a minor tends to be half the number of major courses.

- **Elective courses:** These courses may be chosen from any department. They offer opportunities

to explore other topics or subjects of interest and help make up the total number of credits required to graduate.

## Grades

U.S. universities employ a system of continual assessment and assign grades for each course taken. Almost everything you do for a class will influence your final grade. Examinations and tests, essays or written assignments, laboratory reports, laboratory or studio work, class attendance, and class participation may all be used to determine your final grade. This means it is essential to keep up with your reading and course work and to attend classes on a regular basis.

The following is a general percentage and letter grade scale for classes taken at U.S. colleges:

100 - 90% = A
89 - 80% = B
79 - 70% = C
69 - 65% = D
64 - 0% = F

## What is a GPA?

Each student completes his or her degree with a grade point average (GPA). A cumulative grade point average is the GPA for all courses taken throughout the degree program. Most universities use a GPA scale of 4.0. To work out your GPA, take the numerical value assigned to the letter grade you achieve for each course (typically 4 points for an "A," 3 points for a "B," and so on), then multiply this number by the number of credits each course is worth. Finally, add these numbers together and divide by the total number of credits for all courses. For example:

| Letter Grade | Numerical Value | Number of Credits | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | 4.0 | 3 | 12 |
| B | 3.0 | 3 | 9 |
| C | 2.0 | 3 | 6 |
| | Total | 9 | 27 |

27 divided by 9 = 3.0 GPA

Most universities also offer some sort of honors degree. To qualify for an honors degree, students may be required to fulfill additional credits, write an honors thesis, and/or take a comprehensive exam in their field of concentration; precise details depend upon the university and/or academic department.

## Review

- U.S. bachelor's degrees normally take four years to complete; associate degrees take two years.

- The academic year is determined by the individual college but usually includes two terms, or semesters, and runs from September to May.
- To earn a degree a student must accumulate a certain number of credits. Each course taken is worth a specific number of credits.
- For each course taken, students receive a grade that is based upon a continual assessment of work.
- The grade point average, or GPA, is calculated from the numeric equivalent of the letter grades given for each course. It is used to assess how a student has performed in a degree program.

## Useful Websites

EducationUSA
https://www.educationusa.info

# Community Colleges

*"My community college is in a crowded town that has everything. The school has small classes and very good, professional teachers, most of whom are part-time teachers at universities. The college has a very good transfer program to many universities that offer bachelor's degrees.*

— Computer design student from Sri Lanka

U.S. community colleges, sometimes called junior or technical colleges, provide the first two years of a university education. There are nearly 1,200 two-year, associate-degree granting institutions in the United States. Some community colleges are large, with many campuses in an urban/suburban setting, while others are small and in rural settings. Most community colleges are public institutions and thus financially supported by their state or local government. A small percentage of community colleges are privately controlled, with little or no government assistance. Because of their close ties with local businesses, many community college campuses are equipped with state-of-the-art technology in fields such as biomedical engineering, biotechnology, renewable energy technologies, robotics, laser optics, and geographic information systems.

The number of international students attending community col-

leges has increased dramatically over the past ten years because of their excellent programs, affordable costs, transferable course credits to universities, and English language instruction.

## Programs of Study

### Academic Programs

The first two years of an academic program (undergraduate years 1 and 2) culminate with an Associate of Arts (AA) degree or an Associate of Science (AS) degree. These degrees enable students to transfer credits earned at a community college to a 4-year university bachelor's degree program.

The most popular AA pre-major programs for international students are accounting, architectural design, business management, communication studies, early childhood education, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology. The most popular AS pre-major programs are astronomy, biology, chemistry, computer science, engineering, environmental science, forestry, geology, mathematics, multi-media, physics, and wildlife sciences.

### Workforce Education Programs

Community colleges offer programs focused on occupational and technical skills. These programs, some of which are transferable toward a bachelor's degree, are designed to prepare students for employment immediately after graduation. Once all course requirements have been met, students are eligible to receive an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree or a Certificate of Completion.

Workforce education programs are offered in allied health science (i.e., nursing, dental hygiene, and emergency medical technician programs), architectural design, automotive engineering, aviation flight technology, culinary arts, digital imaging, electronics, graphic design, film/TV production, and hospitality management and tourism. The relevancy and usefulness of these programs for international students depends on licenses and certifications required to work and practice in their home countries.

### Lifelong/Continuing Education Programs

Community colleges provide a broad range of continuing education courses that last from as little as one month to as long as a year. Courses teach students a variety of skills, from computer programming, to playing musical instruments, to speaking new languages. They also help people

accomplish specific goals such as acquiring a real estate license, becoming a U.S. citizen, or exploring artistic endeavors.

Community colleges also offer basic skills programs designed for students who need to improve their English language ability, reading, and/or mathematical skills before taking more advanced courses. Many community colleges in the United States offer English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for immigrants and international students.

## Accreditation

Community colleges are accredited by the same regional accreditation agencies that assess 4-year colleges and universities to ensure that certain criteria and standards are met in all programs offered. College-level classes at community colleges are as rigorous as those given at universities, and because of parallel course offerings, colleges and universities will often allow community college course credits to transfer toward a bachelor's degree at their institution.

## Articulation

Community colleges and 4-year institutions often develop special articulation agreements to ensure that credits and degrees will easily transfer between the institutions. This process is called "2+2". Two years of study at a community college plus two years of study at a university yield a bachelor's degree. Under this system, students must carefully design their program of study, paying close attention to articulation agreements, to ensure that their courses transfer from the community college to the university.

## Students with Disabilities

Community colleges assist students with disabilities by providing a unique learning environment with smaller classes, individualized attention, tutoring centers, and mentoring programs. Supportive environments include specialized equipment for people with mobility, vision, learning, or hearing disabilities. Accommodations may also be made for sign language interpreters, accessible classrooms, note-takers in classes, Braille materials, and extended time for taking tests.

## Admission Requirements

Community colleges aim to ensure that all qualified students have an opportunity to study at a higher education institution. The admission requirements are somewhat flexible, with the understanding that some pre-col-

lege, non-credit courses may be required before a student enrolls in an academic program.

The basic information students need to submit when applying to a community college usually includes:

- An application form;
- Verification of secondary school completion or the equivalent;
- Proof of financial support (an affidavit of support and/or official bank documents); and
- Certification of having met the institution's English language requirements (community colleges may waive or accept lower scores for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and/or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

Although the SAT is not required for admission, taking the test demonstrates a student's interest in, and commitment to, studying in the United States.

## Costs, Work Opportunities, and Scholarships

Tuition and fees at U.S. community colleges are approximately 50% lower than those at 4-year colleges and universities. By starting at a community college, students can substantially lower the total cost of obtaining a bachelor's degree.

Although international students in F-1 or J-1 student status are not allowed to work off-campus during the school year, they may participate in work-study programs on campus for up to 20 hours per week. Students may also be awarded privately funded scholarships, usually after enrolling or following the first year of study. These scholarships are based on academic achievement and accomplishments.

Cooperative education (co-op) programs are found at some U.S. community colleges. Co-ops are programs that integrate classroom studies with paid, productive, real-life work experience in a field related to a student's program of study. These programs provide an in-depth opportunity to cultivate teamwork, leadership, and project management skills. They are also a means of financial assistance since students are paid for their work.

Sports scholarships are another means of financial assistance. Scholarship sports for men include baseball, basketball, cross-country, golf, outdoor track and field, soccer, and tennis. Scholar-

ship sports for women include basketball, cross-country, fast-pitch softball, outdoor track and field, soccer, tennis, and volleyball.

## Flexible English Proficiency Requirements

Many community colleges do not require TOEFL or IELTS test scores because they do their own testing and placement when students arrive on campus and before registration for classes. Students with an adequate skill level will be allowed to immediately begin an academic program. Those whose skills need improvement must attend an Intensive English Program (IEP) or English as a Second Language (ESL) course to meet language prerequisites before entering an academic program.

## Housing Options

Some 250 community colleges provide dormitory living on campus. When a dormitory is not available, colleges can help international students find a host family or a room or apartment to rent. These non-dormitory living arrangements often help students become more independent and give them a closer look at U.S. life.

## Review

- U.S. community colleges, sometimes called junior or technical colleges, provide the first two years of a university education.
- Community colleges may offer workforce education and continuing/lifelong education programs in addition to academic programs.
- Community colleges are cost effective, provide a nurturing learning environment, have smaller classes, and offer extensive support systems.

## Useful Websites

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Website for International Students
www.aaccinternational.org

National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)
www.njcaa.org

# Choosing the Best Colleges for You

*"Look at pictures, download videos, and try to become familiar with the school. Picture yourself on the campus. If you don't like the picture, then try another one!"*

— Management student from Brazil

Choosing universities from thousands of miles away presents some challenges — especially when there are so many great colleges to choose from in the United States. But if you plan ahead and do your research carefully, you will come up with a manageable list of colleges that match your needs. Every student is different, and when making your choices you should consider carefully the factors that are important to you. This chapter discusses what academic, lifestyle, and other factors to consider when putting together a list of 10 to 20 colleges, and it offers guidelines on where to get further help and information. You should begin this process of reflection and research 12 to 18 months before you want to start studying in the United States.

## Sources of Information to Help You Choose

### EducationUSA Advising Centers

There are EducationUSA advising centers in almost every country around the world, and they are the ideal starting point for your research. Centers usually have a library with directories, university catalogs, introductory guides, handouts, and reference books to assist you in applying to study in the United States. Most offer Internet access and have computer-based college search packages to help you choose the best colleges for you. Many have also developed guides, videos, and websites specifically tailored to students applying from your country. They all have trained staff who can answer your questions in person, by telephone, or by e-mail.

### College Websites and E-mail

Almost every U.S. university or college has a website with information about degree programs, application procedures, academic departments, facilities on campus, and other topics. In many cases you will also find a copy of the college catalog and e-mail addresses for current students (including international students) who are happy to answer your questions. If you don't find this information on the website, feel free to ask the admissions office. Once you have narrowed down the colleges and universities you are interested in, you may wish to e-mail professors and admissions personnel to ask specific questions before you decide where to apply.

### College Searches on the Web

Some websites are independent of colleges and universities and allow you to search for institutions by the subject you are interested in studying, by geographic preference, or by a range of other criteria that you specify.

Before beginning these searches online, it is important to ask yourself a series of questions about the kind of university experience you are looking for in the United States: Do you want to live in a big city, or do you prefer a more rural or suburban location? Do you want to attend an institution that has tens of thousands of students, or are you looking for a small or mid-size college or university? Do you want to live on the campus of the institution you attend or would you prefer to live off campus? By answering these questions and others you can refine your search criteria and generate a list of schools that are closely matched with your needs.

## Social Media Tools

Students can access information about U.S. institutions through a variety of technological tools and formats. Online videos, social networking groups, podcasts, and blogs about life on U.S. college and university campuses offer genuine stories and experiences directly from students. EducationUSA advising centers can assist you in finding these resources.

EducationUSATV, a channel on YouTube, broadcasts videos produced by EducationUSA advising centers to help students through the college search process — from taking standardized tests, to completing applications and essays, to securing scholarships and financial aid, to applying for student visas, to attending pre-departure orientations. Videos posted by specific colleges and universities give you the chance to see what these institutions think are their best qualities. Social networking groups allow you to interact with admissions representatives or to communicate with current students. Podcasts provide helpful advice on navigating the application process or allow prospective students to listen to classroom lectures. Blogs give a student perspective of what day-to-day life is like at different universities and colleges. We encourage you to explore all these tools as you search for the right school for you.

## U.S. College/University Fairs and Visits

If you cannot visit the United States, colleges may come to visit you. Your nearest Education USA advising center can tell you about upcoming fairs or other types of visits that give students an opportunity to speak with admissions officers face-to-face. Many of these take place in the spring or fall of the year before you intend to start your studies, so it is important to start your research early. Admissions officers who attend these fairs are eager to get to know you and to find out why you are interested in their college or university and what you want to study. It is a good idea to find out which schools are attending the fair ahead of time so you can do some research on those institutions.

U.S. admissions representatives also give presentations at EducationUSA advising centers throughout the year when they visit other countries. These presentations help students understand the admissions process and what it would be like to be a student on specific campuses. A list of fairs around the world is available on the EducationUSA website.

## Campus Visits

> *"A visit to the school you are considering helps a lot — whether during an exchange year, a vacation trip, or a sports contest."*
>
> — Theater performance student from Finland

If you are able to take a vacation to the United States before you go to college, this could be a great opportunity to visit the campuses you are considering. Many schools organize college tours led by current students; check with the undergraduate admissions office for further information. Visit the academic and housing facilities, the student union, and the library to get a good sense of the campus. Talk to current students to find out what college life is really like. Some private organizations offer tours of U.S. colleges to help prospective students see firsthand if these schools are right for them. Ask for further information about such organizations at your EducationUSA advising center.

## Educational Consultants and Recruiting Agents

In many parts of the world, private agents or agencies work to recruit international students into U.S. colleges. There are also private educational consultants who charge a fee to assist students with the process of choosing U.S. schools and compiling applications. Often these educational consultants and private agents are graduates of U.S. colleges or people who are dedicated to promoting the benefits and advantages of the U.S. education system. However, sometimes they are not, so it is important to check the credentials and past performance of educational consultants or agents before using their services. Sometimes agents or consultants promise things — like being accepted at certain schools — that they cannot deliver. If you do decide to use the services of an agent to assist you in your college search, be actively involved in the process, and be sure to understand what that person or company is realistically able to deliver.

If you have found a recruiting agent or consultant who is helpful, well informed, and dependable, he or she may be very useful in helping you select and apply to a college in the United States. Be careful, however, to look for verifiable signs of the agent's or consultant's past success with students from your country. Ask for a list of names and addresses of references, particularly current students. Write, e-mail, or telephone some of these students to get their firsthand opinion of the college

where they study and the services they received from the agent or consultant. Such precautions are especially important if the agent or consultant charges expensive fees for his or her services. Always check with an unbiased source (such as an EducationUSA advising center) to ensure the legitimacy and accreditation status of the college being represented to you.

## Academic Considerations

### Accreditation and Recognition of Degrees

An important indicator of the quality of any U.S. college or university is its accreditation status. Unlike many other countries, the United States does not have a central government office that approves educational institutions. Instead, it relies on a system of voluntary accreditation carried out by non-governmental accrediting bodies to ensure that schools meet standards.

While almost all U.S. colleges hold widely recognized forms of accreditation, accreditation in the United States is a complex area; there are different types of accreditation and a large number of accrediting bodies. There is also no legal requirement that degree-offering institutions be accredited or hold a particular form of accreditation. Because of this complexity, you should check carefully whether a degree from the institutions you are applying to will be recognized by your home country government and any relevant professional associations, ministries, or employers in your country. You should also talk to graduates who have returned to your country to see if they have been successful in applying degrees earned from such institutions to their chosen professions. If you think you might wish to transfer from one U.S. college to another during your undergraduate studies, or if you might want to pursue graduate study in the United States, you should also check whether other U.S. universities will recognize credits and degrees from the colleges you are considering.

EducationUSA advising centers can advise you regarding recognition of U.S. degrees in your country and tell you whether a U.S. degree-offering institution is appropriately accredited. More detailed information on the topic of accreditation can be found in Booklet Three of this series, *Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation*.

### Major

Your major is the field of study in which you plan to specialize. It is not essential to declare a major

when you enter a university. If you have a definite degree objective, however, you need to identify universities offering that field.

Some subjects are taught at many universities. Knowing which subject you wish to major in may help, but you could still be left with a long list of institutions from which to choose. If there is a particular specialization within a field that interests you (for example, if you are interested in 20th-century history, or environmental geography, or painting within a fine arts degree), identifying which schools offer that specialization will also help you draw up a shortlist of institutions.

Most directories of U.S. universities list schools by the most commonly offered majors. Computer-based search packages available on the Internet or at EducationUSA advising centers can also help you narrow down your choices. Make use of college catalogs and bulletins to check if institutions offer the subjects in which you are interested and that the programs have the particular focus you want.

## Academic Emphasis

You should check to see how the university emphasizes its curriculum. Is the emphasis on professional education or liberal arts? Do undergraduate or graduate students dominate the campus? Many liberal arts colleges emphasize teaching and professor-student interaction, rather than research, so the teacher-to-student ratio is quite low. Some research-centered campuses are dominated by graduate students, but the facilities at these universities are often state-of-the-art and the professors world-renowned.

## Selectivity

Because the U.S. university system is so extensive, admissions requirements vary greatly. Highly selective private universities and liberal arts colleges may receive enormous numbers of applicants and accept only a small number, while other colleges may accept all applicants who meet their admission standards. Most university directories and college catalogs list the number of applicants and the number of students accepted the previous year, plus the average SAT score, ACT score, and grade point average (GPA) for the previous year's accepted students. Remember, however, that admissions officers look at a variety of factors, including essays, prizes, community service and work experience, hobbies, and special talents as they review applications to try to determine students' potential for success at their institutions.

## Degree Program Structure

You should study the course catalog and course descriptions for each institution. Many international students choose the U.S. system because it is flexible enough to allow them to choose courses according to their interests. However, degree programs in some subject areas are highly structured, and universities dictate exactly which courses a student must take and when in order to graduate with a major in that area. This type of prescribed coursework limits flexibility and, for example, does not allow student athletes to have a lighter workload during the playing season or permit motivated students to pursue a double major.

It is important to check the requirements of any majors you may wish to pursue. For example, if you want to major in engineering but also want to gain a strong academic background in business, be sure to check the requirements of the engineering degree — are they too numerous to allow you to take additional business courses, or is there a specific program for people who wish to combine engineering with a related subject?

There is also great variation between course requirements in liberal arts colleges. Some colleges require students to take a certain number of classes in specified subject groups, while other liberal arts colleges have no such requirements, merely making the "strong recommendation" that students complete a well-rounded education.

## Advanced Standing

U.S. students begin higher education after 12 years of elementary and secondary education. Some U.S. universities award advanced credit to students from education systems with 13 years of elementary and secondary education or those who have taken the International Baccalaureate. Students who have undertaken postsecondary vocational and technical diplomas, certificates, or similar programs may also qualify for some credit toward their degree. Such students may not have to be enrolled for the full four years in the United States and may be able to enter university with advanced standing. You should ask admissions officers about this possibility and read chapter 10, "Transferring to a U.S. University," for further details.

## Student-to-Teacher Ratio

At large universities, undergraduate freshman and sophomore classes are usually large, and you are likely to be taught by graduate students rather than professors. At a college, where there

are fewer graduate students, you are likely to be taught by a professor and will be required to make a greater contribution to classes from the start. A high student-to-teacher ratio indicates that classes will be large, reducing the amount of attention faculty can give to individual students.

## Lifestyle Considerations

### Cost

Financing your education is a very important consideration, and you should read chapter 6 of this booklet for further details about calculating costs and the possibility of receiving financial aid. Know what you can realistically afford before applying. Carefully study the fee structures printed in university catalogs, and incorporate the cost of room, food, tuition, fees, travel, and other expenses into your calculations for the full four years. You also need to consider that tuition costs may rise, as many universities increase their tuition every year. Be sure to compare the payment plans of various institutions.

### Housing

Since all colleges have different housing facilities and policies, find out if housing is available for all four years of enrollment or if students are required to find off-campus housing. Investigate the price difference between on-campus and off-campus housing. Check the living arrangements for on-campus housing; students living in dormitories may be required to share a room with one, two, or three other students. Living on campus, at least for the first year or two, may help you integrate into U.S. university life more easily and quickly. It can also save you the additional expense of buying a car or paying for daily public transportation, as well as the time needed to travel back and forth to campus each day. By your junior year, however, you may wish to move off campus into your own apartment. Be sure to find out the university's policy on such a move, as well as the cost and availability of local housing.

### Location

Every region of the United States offers both urban and rural settings. City-based campuses offer a variety of eating, entertainment, cultural, and shopping facilities. A rural university may mean a quieter, more college-centered environment. Climate is another consideration. From the four seasons in the Northeast to the desert in Arizona and a sub-tropical climate in Florida, the variety is almost endless. Also keep in mind accessibility to local

facilities and services that could be useful to you in your studies. For example, if you wish to major in art history, does the school offer programs that involve students with nearby museums and art galleries?

### Size

Student populations on U.S. campuses range in size from 200 to 60,000 students. Some universities resemble small cities with their own post offices, grocery stores, and shopping centers. Other colleges may be in large, densely populated urban areas but have a very small enrollment. Depending on your lifestyle, you may enjoy the independence afforded by being part of a very large student population on your campus, or you may prefer the more personal touch of a small college. You should not make assumptions regarding social life or access to professors based on the size of an institution.

## College Environment

### Social Life

Most U.S. colleges offer students a variety of social, cultural, and sports activities in addition to their academic programs. The level to which each is emphasized helps determine the social environment on campus. Whether the majority of the students live on or off a university campus also has an impact. At colleges referred to as commuter schools, most students live off campus and commute to classes. Potential undergraduates will want to know what the atmosphere is like during the weekends on campus — do most students stay at the university or leave to take trips or return home to visit family every weekend? All of these factors will have an effect on the campus social life.

### Fraternities and Sororities

Fraternities and sororities are national social organizations with smaller groups or "chapters" on campuses throughout the United States. Perhaps most well known for the parties and social activities they organize, fraternities and sororities also sponsor philanthropic activities and take part in community service projects. Together fraternities (for men) and sororities (for women) comprise the "Greek system." The term "Greek" is used because the names of fraternities and sororities are composed of two or three Greek letters. Fraternities and sororities can be the focus of undergraduate social life on many U.S. campuses. If you have a strong preference for or against the Greek system, find out whether fraternities and sororities dominate the social life

at the colleges and universities to which you are applying. If you do not wish to be part of Greek life, attending a university where the Greek scene is prevalent could be problematic, because the pressure to join might be high and the social life options outside of the system limited.

## International Students

The number of international students enrolled at U.S. colleges ranges from fewer than 10 to more than 7,000. College directories often list exactly how many international students are enrolled alongside other data on each institution. EducationUSA advising centers usually have a variety of reference books that can provide you with this type of information.

When considering these figures, think about your own needs. On campuses where there are few international students you may be considered a very special person to get to know. However, you may find that these schools provide fewer services for international students. Campuses with many international students may provide a built-in support group that can share your experiences, but it may require extra effort on your part to make sure you meet and interact with U.S. students.

## Affiliations

While all U.S. colleges will accept students of any race, color, or creed, a small percentage of universities were founded with missions to provide a religious atmosphere on campus, a single-sex educational experience, or a place where students from a particular background can live and learn together. We recommend that you read the mission statements of the schools to which you plan to apply to decide if your goals match the goals of the campuses. Out of more than 4,000 U.S. colleges and universities, there are more than 800 affiliated with a specific church denomination or religious tradition, approximately 60 colleges for men only, and approximately 50 for women only. The U.S. higher education system also includes institutions that serve students from a specific background such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving Institutions (HSIs), and tribal colleges and universities.

## Extracurricular Activities

U.S. universities offer many extracurricular activities such as sports, academic clubs, university newspapers, drama productions, and community service projects. If you have a definite interest, make sure there is a student so-

ciety that caters to it — don't forget, though, that if there isn't, you can always start one. Learning about various student organizations will help you better understand student life at different colleges.

## Other Considerations

### Beyond the Ivy League

The "Ivy League" now associated with a group of eight highly exclusive institutions was originally a sports league for several East Coast colleges. Many international students begin their U.S. college search assuming they must attend an Ivy League institution to get a good education. While the Ivy League schools are all excellent institutions, it is important to remember that there are more than 4,000 U.S. colleges and universities from which to choose. Do not dismiss a university or college just because you have not heard of it before; you should consider your own needs first. Investigate all options carefully to make sure you find institutions that suit your own needs and interests.

### Rankings

There is no official list of the top 10, 20, 50, or even 100 universities in the United States. The U.S. government does not rank universities. Many rankings are subjective and may be based on criteria that do not include academic standards or general reputation as primary factors. In addition, many good schools choose not to provide information to the organizations that produce rankings. Be particularly wary of rankings that do not explain the criteria on which they are based. The more established rankings can provide a starting point for your search, but the "best" college is the one that is right for you based on the factors suggested in this chapter.

### Student Services

U.S. universities offer students a variety of services such as international student offices, campus orientation programs, counseling services, legal aid services, housing offices, varied meal plans, health centers, tutoring facilities, English as a Second Language programs, writing laboratories, and career counseling. Compare facilities among universities to find the services that meet your specific needs.

### Internship or Overseas Study Programs

Many U.S. universities have incorporated internship (voluntary or paid work placements) or overseas study programs into their curriculum that may be of interest to you.

## Students with Disabilities

If you have special needs, make sure that the university you choose can accommodate you. Allow plenty of time to correspond with colleges. Begin your inquiries at least two years before you plan to leave for the United States. When you write for information from universities, give brief details of your disability and request information about assistance for students like you. You may also want to contact the office on campus that deals with the special needs of students with disabilities to find out more about the available services. This may be a specific office such as the Office of Disabled Student Services or the Office of Disability Services, or it may be housed within a general student services office on campus.

Some colleges offer comprehensive programs for students with learning disabilities, while others make a number of special services available to such students. You and your family should look at the services offered and compare them to your needs. Find out which services are provided automatically and free of charge, and which services need to be pre-arranged and incur a charge. When you apply you will need to supply evidence to support the existence of your disability. If possible, contact a student at the college who has a similar disability to yours so you can gain a more personal perspective, and visit the campus if you can. Students with disabilities can, with proper documentation, request special facilities or extended time to take the SAT and ACT undergraduate admissions tests and course examinations during the academic year.

## Review

- To narrow your list of universities, make a list of factors that are important to you, such as academic considerations, location, and cost. Search for colleges that meet the requirements you have specified.
- Consult university directories; use a computer- or web-based search program to help narrow the field. These are often available at EducationUSA advising centers.
- Find out opportunities to meet U.S. college representatives and have your questions answered, or use e-mail to correspond with college staff and students.
- There are no official rankings of universities in the United States, so look carefully at the criteria of any you may find.

## Useful Websites

Directory of EducationUSA Advising Centers
http://www.educationusa.info/centers.php

University of Texas at Austin Database of U.S. Universities
http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/

College Board College Search
https://www.collegeboard.org

U.S. Department of Education College Navigator
http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/

The Princeton Review
http://www.princetonreview.com/

Council for Higher Education Accreditation
http://www.chea.org

U.S. Department of Education Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs
http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation/

Mobility International USA (Information for Students with Disabilities)
http://www.miusa.org

# Entrance Requirements

To be eligible for admission to a U.S. university, you must meet certain minimum entry requirements. These include a secondary school diploma or examination results, a score from one of the U.S. university admissions tests (in most cases), and English language ability. How to put together successful applications is covered in chapter 8 of this booklet.

## Secondary School Diplomas/ Examination Results

Most U.S. universities expect international students to have a secondary school diploma or secondary school examination results that would enable them to attend a university in their home country. This is particularly true of the most competitive univer-

sities. However, remember that there are a wide range of admission standards and acceptance rates among U.S. universities and colleges. Since the U.S. system of education places great emphasis on breadth of knowledge, it is also important that your secondary school study has included a variety of subjects such as English, mathematics, natural sciences (physics, chemistry, and/or biology), humanities or social sciences (history, geography, economics, politics, or similar subjects), and a foreign language. Universities will not usually accept international students who are younger than age 17.

## Standardized Admissions Tests

> *"Take the time to be well prepared for the standardized tests you need to complete. They are long and exhausting — and you may want to repeat them to improve your score."*
>
> — Fine arts student from Brazil

As part of the application process, most U.S. colleges and universities require scores from one of the U.S. standardized admissions tests. However, some colleges and universities do not require international applicants to take admissions tests, and some schools do not ask for admissions test scores from any applicant. To find specific admissions test requirements, use U.S. university directories such as The College Board's *International Student Handbook* and *Peterson's Colleges and Universities in the U.S.A. — The Complete Guide for International Students*. Also note that community colleges do not usually require applicants to take standardized admissions tests.

U.S. standardized admissions tests are primarily multiple-choice tests that measure the skills necessary for undergraduate study. U.S. colleges and universities use admissions tests to assess all applicants (from the United States and other countries) against the same standards. Keep in mind that secondary school diplomas and examinations are not equivalent to admissions tests, and that tests are only one part of the application — good test scores alone do not guarantee admission to the schools of your choice.

Three main tests play a role in the admissions review:

- The SAT
- SAT Subject Tests
- The ACT

Some universities require their own examinations or additional tests, so be sure to check with the

institutions to which you plan to apply.

## The SAT

Both the SAT and SAT Subject Tests are given six times throughout the year at locations outside the United States. Pre-registration is required, and deadlines are usually about five weeks before the exam. Specific information about dates, test centers, fees, and registration procedures is available in the SAT international registration bulletin or on the SAT website at http://www.collegeboard.com/testing. You can get copies of the registration bulletin from your nearest EducationUSA advising center, and you can download information and register online in most cases. The College Board website also includes a full-length practice test and many sample questions. EducationUSA advising centers usually have SAT test preparation materials with sample questions for reference use, loan, or purchase.

Content: The SAT is a primarily multiple-choice test that measures your critical reading, mathematical, and writing abilities. The test is divided into nine sections of varying length: three critical reading; three mathematical; three writing (one of which is a 25-minute essay); and one additional section, the equating section, which is either critical reading or mathematical. This last portion is used to ensure the same level of difficulty from year to year and does not count toward your score. The 25-minute SAT essay presents an issue that is accessible to all students and asks you to develop your point of view on the topic, including examples that support your position.

The SAT Subject Tests are also primarily multiple choice, but are only one hour long. They measure knowledge in specific subject areas. The subjects currently offered are:

- U.S. History
- Biology
- Chemistry
- Chinese
- French
- German
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Latin
- Literature
- Mathematics
- Modern Hebrew
- Physics
- Spanish
- World History

Many U.S. colleges and universities, especially those that have

more competitive admissions criteria, either require or recommend one or more SAT Subject Test scores for admission and/or placement purposes. Be sure to check each institution's requirements before registering for any SAT Subject Test. While some colleges specify which subject tests you must take, others leave the option up to you. In this case, take exams in your strongest areas of study.

Scores: The three sections of the SAT are each scored on a 200 to 800 scale. Therefore, the highest possible combined score on the SAT is 2,400. Scores for each section are reported separately to colleges. Most college catalogs and admission materials quote average scaled scores for each institution to give some guidance on relative selectivity. If an institution does not list an average writing score, that's only because that section of the test is relatively new. Writing scores are always a part of the SAT report.

The SAT Subject Tests are also scored on a 200 to 800 scale.

### The ACT University-Entrance Exam (The ACT)

The ACT is administered by ACT, Inc. and is given up to five times annually at testing locations around the world. It is curriculum based, meaning it directly tests students on the subjects they learn in school. Registration deadlines are approximately 5 weeks prior to the exam, and international students register for the ACT online. More specific information about dates, test centers, and free test preparation materials is available at http://www.actstudent.org.

Content: The ACT is a curriculum-based multiple-choice exam that measures student achievement in English, math, reading, and science reasoning. It also contains an optional writing component. Please check with the colleges and universities to which you are applying to see if they require the ACT writing component.

Scores: Students receive a raw score, which is the total number of correct responses, for each of the four subject areas. The score is then converted into a scaled score from 1 to 36. A composite score is then calculated by adding together the scaled scores and dividing the sum by four. The highest possible composite score is 36, and the lowest is 1. Scores take 4 to 8 weeks to reach universities.

## English Language Ability

A basic requirement for successful study in the United States is

the ability to communicate in English. If English is not your native language, U.S. universities and colleges will ask you to take an English language proficiency test before admitting you to a degree program. Information on the two most common tests, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), is included below. Each institution sets its own English language admissions standard, so check with the institutions to which you plan to apply to find out their requirements.

Some institutions may grant conditional acceptance with the understanding that you will attend English language classes at their college prior to starting your degree program. Once you have reached the required English language level, you will be able to start your studies. Keep in mind, however, that in some cases it may be difficult for you to obtain a student visa in your country if you cannot prove sufficient command of the English language to begin study in the United States.

If you are a non-U.S. citizen and non-native speaker of English who has been educated in English for most of your school life, English Language testing requirements may be waived. Allow time in the application process to correspond with U.S. universities about this issue. U.S. universities are unlikely to accept secondary school English language examination results as proof of your language ability.

## Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

The TOEFL measures the ability of non-native English speakers to communicate in an academic setting.

The TOEFL Internet-based test (iBT) has four sections: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Candidates have up to four hours to complete the test, which is administered via computer from a secure Internet-based testing network through certified testing sites.

The paper-based TOEFL (TOEFL PBT) provides TOEFL testing in areas where TOEFL iBT is not available and to supplement the TOEFL iBT test center network. The paper-based TOEFL does not include a speaking section. If you choose to take the TOEFL, but live in a country that does not offer the TOEFL iBT, you can contact ETS at toefl@ets.org to request

the Test of Spoken English (TSE) to evaluate your oral proficiency.

TOEFL registration is available online, by phone, and by mail, and pre-registration is required. At certain times of year, or in certain cities, centers may become full, so be sure to register early. For more information about registration, test dates, test preparation, and other issues, visit the TOEFL website at www.ets.org/toefl or contact your nearest EducationUSA advising center.

### International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

IELTS is a paper-based test that assesses English language ability in reading, listening, writing, and speaking.

The reading and writing portions of IELTS are available in two versions: Academic and General Training. The listening and speaking modules are the same in both versions. Test takers interested in entering higher education programs or pursuing a license in the healthcare professions usually take the Academic version of the reading and writing modules. The General Training version is for test takers who need to use English daily for functional activities, secondary education, vocational training, work purposes, or immigration.

For registration information please visit the IELTS website at www.ielts.org. The website includes a downloadable "Information for Candidates" booklet, plus a list of IELTS centers, test dates, and the cost of the test in local currencies.

## Review

- To apply to a U.S. bachelor's degree program, you must have a secondary school diploma or examination results from your home country.
- You must be at least 17 years of age.
- Many, but not all, colleges require international applicants to take an admissions test, usually the SAT or the ACT. Some may also require SAT Subject Tests. Check ahead to determine specific test requirements.
- The ACT and SAT tests are offered several times per academic year, and registration materials are available from the test administrators or from EducationUSA advising centers. You can also register on the Internet.

- If English is not your first language, you will most likely need to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS). In certain cases, another English language proficiency test may be acceptable.

## Useful Websites

The SAT
http://sat.collegeboard.org/home

The ACT
http://www.actstudent.org

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)
http://www.ets.org/toefl

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)
http://www.ielts.org

# Financing Your Education

Education in the United States may appear expensive, but you have probably already realized that it offers excellent value for the money invested. This chapter looks in more detail at the costs involved and the ways that you might cover your expenses, including financial aid from colleges and other sources.

## Planning Ahead

> *"Be realistic about how much you need and what you can really afford."*
>
> — International studies student from Ghana

It is important to understand and plan the cost and financing of your education before you prepare and submit your applications to colleges. Universities and colleges will usually require a financial statement and guarantees as part of their application procedure. In addition, to apply for your student visa you will need to prove you are able to meet all the costs of your studies. If you are married and/or have children, you will also need to prove in advance that you have sufficient funds to support both you and your family.

## Calculating Your Expenses

The main types of costs involved in studying in the United States are tuition and fees, plus living costs. These vary widely, which gives you some control over the costs involved in your education. All U.S. colleges publish information on the costs for their institution and area. Consider the points outlined below in calculating your costs.

### Tuition and Fees

Tuition is the cost of instruction, and fees are the costs associated with services such as the library, student activities, or the health center. International students are required to pay both tuition and fees. Some universities also charge an additional fee for health insurance, which is mandatory for all students.

Tuition and fees vary greatly from school to school, and there is no correlation between the level of tuition and fees and the quality of an institution. Tuition and fees are generally higher for private universities than for state universities. Community, technical, and vocational colleges charge the lowest fees of all. State universities charge out-of-state residents higher tuition than state residents. In almost all instances, international students studying at state schools will have to pay this higher rate throughout their study program since they do not qualify for residents' rates. Not all universities charging the lowest tuition and fees also have the lowest living costs; you should examine both factors to get a more accurate estimate of your annual expenses.

Because tuition and fees vary from school to school and rise by an average of 5 percent each year, be sure to consult current college catalogs, websites, or reference materials (available at EducationUSA advising centers) for the latest figures. Be sure to confirm current costs with the institution at the time you apply.

### Living Costs

Living costs vary widely and depend on individual lifestyles. Living expenses are highest in large cities, in California, and in the Northeast. Costs can be much lower in the South, the Midwest, and other areas. University catalogs and websites are a good source of information on current living costs. Within the total living costs they quote, you will usually find an approximate breakdown of costs for items such as room, board, books, medical insurance, and personal expenses.

Your EducationUSA advising center may also have information on the latest monthly living expenses by city or institution.

When calculating your basic living expenses, remember to include the following in addition to food and housing:

**Books and Supplies:** Colleges estimate the cost for books and supplies for the academic year. Students studying in the United States must buy their textbooks, and books can be quite expensive. Most institutions have on-campus bookstores. Many of these stores allow you to purchase used books at a lower cost, or to sell back your books at the end of a semester at partial value. If you are planning to study in a field that requires special supplies, such as engineering, art, or architecture, your expenses are likely to be greater than the average.

**Transportation:** The living costs quoted by most universities do not include trips between the United States and your home country. Be sure that your annual budget includes expenses for return travel between your home country and your college. If you plan to live off campus and commute to college, you should add in your commuting expenses. Commuter colleges will provide an estimate of those expenses in their living costs.

**Other Personal Expenses:** Personal expenses include items such as the cost of basic goods, clothing, and services. Health insurance is required. If you have dependents — a spouse and/or children — or if you have special medical needs, substantial additional funds will be needed to meet your living expenses.

## Financing Your Education

It is important to start your financial planning at least 12 months before you intend to study in the United States. Financing your college education consists of:

- compiling effective applications (see chapter 8);
- assessing personal funds
- identifying financial assistance for which you are eligible; and
- reducing educational costs.

### Assessing Personal Funds

Consult your parents and other family sponsors to find out how much money they can commit each year to your education. Try

to raise as much as you can from family sources, because most scholarship awards, if available, cover only part of the total educational and living costs and may not be available to first-year international students.

## Identifying Sources of Financial Assistance

All types of scholarships and financial aid for international students are highly competitive and require excellent academic records. You will often find the terms "scholarships" and "financial aid" used interchangeably, but technically speaking, a scholarship is a financial award based on merit, including outstanding academic performance, special talent in sports or performing arts, or perhaps community service or leadership. Financial aid is a "need-based" grant based on the student's financial need, as documented by family income, assets, and other factors. Below are the main types of financial assistance available for international students who want to study in the United States:

**Home Country Funds:** Conduct research at home to find possible funding from local government, corporate, or foundation sources. Although these sources are not found in all countries, you could reduce your educational cost with scholarships from local organizations.

**Funding from Colleges:** Meet with an EducationUSA adviser to learn how to research available financial aid for international students. Careful advance research and realistic expectations are more likely to result in success. Do not assume that all colleges award financial aid. In fact, less than half of the institutions offering bachelor's degrees can provide financial assistance to students who are not citizens or permanent residents of the United States. Keep in mind that financial aid for U.S. students is separate from financial aid for international students. Be sure to tell the admissions office your country of citizenship and request information on financial aid available to non-U.S. citizens. If offered, financial aid is usually made up of a number of different types of assistance, including grants and scholarships and occasionally loans or part-time work programs.

Financial aid is rare at public colleges and at colleges that offer professional courses such as engineering, business administration, and health professions. More financial aid may be available from private liberal arts colleges.

As you do your research, make a table listing the colleges you would like to attend. Write down annual costs (as outlined above), and then enter the average financial aid award and the number of awards made by each of the colleges. Such information is available from resources in your EducationUSA advising center. This table will allow you to quickly see where your best chances lie and can help you eliminate from your list the colleges where you are not likely to receive adequate funding if admitted.

International students often ask advisers about full scholarships, which cover all the costs of education except for airfare. The total number of full scholarships available each year to incoming international students in the United States is about 2,000, offered by only about 100 colleges. To get a full scholarship, you must be one of the top students in your country, usually with "A"s (excellent) in almost every subject, high ACT or SAT and TOEFL or IELTS scores, and distinguished performance in other areas such as leadership and community service. There are 20 top students from all over the world competing for each scholarship, so you must distinguish yourself among a pool of outstanding students.

Only a handful of wealthy colleges in the United States are able to meet the financial need of all the students they admit. (Please note that admission to these schools is usually very competitive.) Financial need is the difference between the estimated cost of attending the college and what you and your family can afford to contribute. Your family's contribution is calculated on the basis of detailed information about your parents' financial circumstances, including supporting evidence such as bank statements, employers' letters, and other official documents and statements. Other universities, which make more limited awards on the basis of your financial need, will also ask to see such evidence.

Financial assistance from colleges is awarded at the beginning of the academic year and is rarely available for students entering mid-year in January or at other times. More aid is available for freshman students than for those transferring in from other institutions. Students who have already proven themselves at a college may find it easier to obtain financial assistance from that college than new students.

**Sports Scholarships:** Some U.S. colleges offer opportunities for gifted student athletes to play for a college team as a means of

paying for their education. See chapter 7 for further details, including how to apply for a sports scholarship.

**International Awards:** International students also ask about financial assistance from foundations, organizations, and the U.S. government. Very little aid exists through such sources, and it is usually earmarked for advanced graduate students. Your EducationUSA adviser can tell you whether there are special funds available for students from your country.

**Loans:** In limited instances, you may be able to negotiate a loan to fund part of your educational costs. Your EducationUSA adviser may have information on loan programs for which you may be eligible. You must usually have a U.S. citizen co-signer to act as a guarantor for loans from U.S. loan programs, and in most cases you must already be enrolled in a U.S. university before you apply. Before taking a loan, make certain you know how you are going to repay it, and how a loan will affect your plans for further study and for returning home.

**Employment:** Current immigration regulations permit international students in F-1 or J-1 student status to work on campus up to 20 hours per week while school is in session and full-time during vacation periods. By working 10 to 15 hours a week, you could earn enough to pay for incidentals such as books, clothing, and personal expenses, but your campus job cannot pay your major expenses, such as tuition or room and board. This income also cannot be used as a source of income for any official financial statements. Campus jobs may include working at the university's cafeteria, bookstore, library, or health club, or in one of the university's administrative offices.

After the first year, you can also apply for employment as a resident assistant (RA) in a university dormitory. RAs serve as the first point of contact for students needing assistance or who have queries regarding dorm life. In return, RAs receive free accommodation and sometimes a small salary and/or meal plan.

Under current regulations, after your first year of study, you may apply to the Department of Homeland Security for permission to work off campus for up to 20 hours per week when school is in session or up to full time during vacation periods if you can demonstrate economic hardship. You should note, however, that there is no guarantee that this re-

quest will be granted. If you are married and are in the United States on an F-1 student visa (see chapter 11), your spouse does not have permission to work. If you are in the United States on a J-1 student visa, your spouse is allowed to request a temporary work permit.

You should always check with your international student adviser before considering any form of employment. More information about working in the United States is available in chapter 12 of this booklet and in Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*.

## Reducing Educational Costs

When planning your finances, consider these ways to reduce your costs:

**Best Buys:** Look for the colleges that offer you the highest quality education at the lowest cost.

**Accelerated Programs:** Completing a four-year bachelor's degree in three years saves thousands of dollars. Students can accelerate their program by:

- earning transfer credit or advanced standing for college-level studies completed in their home country (for example through A-levels, International Baccalaureate, advanced placement exams, or courses taken at local accredited postsecondary institutions, if accepted by the U.S. institution);
- taking courses at a nearby community college if tuition is lower and credits are transferable;
- attending classes during the summer if they are available; or
- taking one additional course each semester.

**Tuition Waivers:** Based on your first-year grades, some colleges award partial tuition waivers. A superior academic record could save you thousands of dollars.

**Living Expenses:** Becoming a resident assistant in a dormitory could save thousands of dollars in living costs. Living off campus with a relative or friend saves money if suitable accommodation is available and public transport is efficient.

**Two-Year and Community Colleges:** Many students save thousands of dollars in tuition by attending community colleges for their first two years and then transferring to four-year institutions to complete their degree.

## Review

- Start your financial planning at the same time you begin choosing colleges — at least 12 months before you wish to study in the United States.
- Tuition costs vary from college to college. Private universities charge more than state universities, which in turn charge more than community colleges. Research actual costs very carefully.
- Cost is not an indication of the quality of an institution.
- Living expenses vary depending on location and your lifestyle.
- Many colleges expect you and your family to fund the full cost of your education.
- The main source of possible financial assistance is the college where you are applying; however, funds available for international students are limited, and full funding is very rare.
- Financial assistance can be awarded as scholarships, grants, and, in some instances, through work-study or loans. Aid, if available, is usually based on merit, but sometimes on need.
- Opportunities to work in the United States are limited and cannot be used as official sources of funding.
- Talented athletes may try to obtain sports scholarships (see the next chapter for further details).
- You can reduce the costs of your education in the United States in a number of ways; taking courses at community colleges and accelerated programs are just two examples.

## Useful Websites

EducationUSA Website – Financial Assistance
http://www.educationusa.info/pages/students/finance.php

Institute for International Education – Funding for U.S. Study
http://www.fundingusstudy.org/

# Advice and Information for International Student Athletes

International student athletes have competed for U.S. colleges and universities for more than 100 years, and the number of international student athletes on U.S. campuses has steadily increased in recent years, with many coaches actively recruiting them.

If you are a student athlete, you must become familiar with the requirements for individuals who wish to participate in collegiate level sporting opportunities at schools that belong to one of the three collegiate athletic associations. While going through the usual process of researching, selecting, and applying to colleges and universities that meet your needs, you will also have to complete additional steps to become eligible to participate in and represent an institution in the competitions organized by these associations.

## Major Collegiate Level Athletic Associations

**National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA):** This is the oldest, biggest, and most well known collegiate athletic association in the United States. More than 380,000 student athletes participate in NCAA competitions, with around 126,000 of them receiving either partial or full athletic scholarships. More than 1,000 four-year colleges and universities are members of the NCAA in one of three divisions. Divisions are determined pri-

marily by: the number of sports that member institutions must sponsor; contest and participation minimums; scheduling criteria; the number of games that must be played; and the sources of athletic funding. The NCAA website (www.ncaa.org) lists member institutions by sport, division, and state.

**National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA):** This association is made up of more than 500 two-year member institutions. Approximately 43,500 student athletes compete in three NJCAA divisions, and many schools with Division I and II teams offer partial and/or full athletic scholarships for which international students are eligible. The NJCAA website (www.njcaa.org) lists member institutions by region, name, and sport/division.

**National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA):** This association has 50,000 student athletes participating at nearly 300 four-year member institutions throughout the United States and Canada, many of which offer athletic scholarships. There are no divisions within the NAIA association. The member institutions are listed by name, state, and conference (region) on the NAIA website (www.naia.org).

## Sports Sponsored by Athletic Associations

The sports sponsored by each athletic association are clearly listed on their websites. Note that not all schools participate in competitions for all sports, even if the association that they belong to sponsors competitions in that sport. For example some NCAA schools have golf teams, and others do not. Keep in mind too, that in some cases institutions have a men's or a women's team for a particular sport but not both.

## Academic Eligibility Requirements and Process for Athletic Associations

Each athletic association sets its own eligibility requirements, and these requirements differ between divisions. For example, the classes that students must have taken between years 9 and 12 are very specific and differ between NCAA Divisions I and II, while NCAA Division III schools make their own individual decisions about this matter. At NJCAA and NAIA schools, the academic eligibility requirements, which are clearly stated on the association websites, are more flexible than at most NCAA schools; student athletes who are unable to fulfill NCAA academic requirements may qualify at NJCAA or

NAIA schools. Be sure to review the eligibility requirements on each association website carefully. They will include rules about what subjects you must take in years 9 through 12, what grades you need to achieve, minimum SAT/ACT test scores, and date of graduation, among other things.

Meeting an athletic association's academic eligibility criteria and being certified as eligible to play for a team are only part of the process. You must also meet the eligibility criteria for entrance into the institution you would like to attend, just like any student who is not an athlete. In many cases the institutional requirements are stricter than the eligibility criteria.

## Amateurism Eligibility Requirements for Athletic Associations

In addition to the academic eligibility requirements set by the NCAA, NJCAA, and NAIA, all student athletes have to meet strict amateurism requirements. This means that every athlete must meet the association's definition of an "amateur" — or not professional — athlete. The rules and regulations about amateur status can be found on each association's website, and the criteria include whether or not you have ever: (1) earned a salary for participating in sport; (2) had a contract with a professional team or played with professionals; (3) entered into an agreement with an agent; or (4) received prize money.

## Eligibility Certification by Athletic Associations

Every college-bound student who wishes to participate in athletics at an NCAA Division I or II institution for the first time must be certified by the NCAA Eligibility Center before he or she can: (1) accept an athletic scholarship; (2) practice or compete for an NCAA team; or (3) apply for a student visa or arrive in the United States as a student. Interested students must complete the "Student Release Form" and the amateurism questionnaire found on the NCAA website and pay 75 dollars to register. Athletes should not register until after they have begun grade 11, and there is no registration deadline.

The NJCAA "Eligibility Affidavit" and "Amateurism Questionnaire" are also available online. The eligibility regulations and requirements for NAIA schools are available on the NAIA website and are checked and enforced by the member institutions.

Remember that eligibility certification has nothing to do with admission to an institution, and it does not guarantee a place on a team or an athletic scholarship.

## Sports Resumes and How to Find and Contact Coaches

You should write a 1-2 page sports resume to send to coaches at schools that you determine meet your needs. This should be short, to the point, and preferably in bulleted format. Supply your contact details and information about your sports history, achievements, ranking, and academic/sporting goals. You should also clearly specify your graduation date, intended major (if known), current GPA, and physical statistics such as height and weight. The purpose of a sports resume is to allow a coach to quickly determine your potential and suitability for a team, and hopefully to attract the coach's interest. Some coaches will ask for a video or DVD of you playing your sport. This should not be a recording of just sporting highlights, but should be all-inclusive.

You will probably have to spend a fair bit of time researching sporting opportunities and communicating with coaches, so you should start this process 18 to 24 months ahead of when you wish to begin studying in the United States. Check the "Athletics Department" section of a college or university website to look for contact details for coaches or other athletic department staff. Admissions office staff may also be able to assist you in contacting coaches. Sometimes there is an admissions or athletics staff member who specializes in student athlete advising. Some college and university websites have questionnaires for prospective student athletes to fill out online, perhaps eliminating the need for a sports resume.

In some instances coaches actively recruit athletes by contacting potential students. This is always very flattering to athletes, but make sure that you look for a range of alternatives that will meet all of your needs rather than only considering schools from which coaches make contacts.

Some athletes decide to pay a placement service to help them obtain a sports scholarship. Ask your EducationUSA advising center for details about placement services available in your country or online.

## Athletic/Sports Scholarships

Athletic scholarships are available at a wide range of institu-

tions, and they cover part or all of the cost of the tuition, fees, books, and living costs associated with attending a U.S. college or university. They do not cover the cost of traveling between your home country and the school, personal expenses such as telephone service, laundry, and snacks, or travel not related to team participation. Not all colleges offer financial assistance based on athletic ability. Students with sports scholarships may study for any undergraduate degree offered by an institution, but must meet the usual entrance requirements required of all applicants. Athletic scholarships are offered for one academic year at a time, and athletes must obtain satisfactory grades as well as maintain their level of sporting performance in order to have their sports scholarship renewed.

## Other Options for Athletes

There are numerous opportunities at all U.S. colleges and universities to keep fit, train, and play competitive sports at community, club, and recreational levels. Most campus athletic facilities are available to all students at no or low cost, and playing sports is a great way to make friends and become involved in campus life.

## Review

- Start planning early — spend lots of time researching academic and sporting options at a variety of colleges and universities.
- Know and follow the athletic association rules.
- Follow up on every lead or suggestion.
- Be persistent and timely.
- Create and send out a sports resume.
- An athletic scholarship may cover all or part of your tuition and living costs.
- Student athletes must meet college or university entrance requirements in addition to athletic association requirements.

## Useful Websites

National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)
http://www.ncaa.org

National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)
http://www.naia.org

National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)
http://www.njcaa.org

# Preparing a Successful Application

Once you have a shortlist of colleges that match your needs, interests, and abilities and are confident that you have met the minimum entrance requirements and can afford the costs of a U.S. undergraduate education, you are ready to start putting together your applications. This chapter gives practical information and advice to help you make successful applications to the colleges of your choice.

The entire application process, from obtaining initial information to applying for your student visa, should begin 12 to 18 months in advance of when you want to go to the United States. See chapter 9 for a summary of the time frame for applying to U.S. universities. It is possible to complete the process in less than 12 months, but late applicants usually find they have a much more limited choice of colleges and less success in securing financial aid.

## Requesting Application Materials

Because of the work and the costs involved in putting together a good application, most students limit their applications to between four and seven colleges. However, you can request information from as many universities as you like. If you have a clear idea of exactly which schools you will be applying to, you may request information only from those few. Or you may prefer to request information from between 10 and 20 schools that you believe meet your needs, and then narrow down your list once you have read through the catalogs, application forms, and other information you receive.

If you have access to the Internet, you will find that many U.S. universities include their catalogs on their websites, and some have even stopped printing paper copies. Many also have online application forms. If there is an online application, you should use it. This is the quickest method for submitting your application. E-mail is the easiest way to request an application and other materials, and U.S. universities are usually quick to respond.

If you do not have access to the Internet and need printed copies of application materials and catalogs, contact each university by writing a letter or by sending a fax. Due to the cost of mailing to other countries, you may receive a shortened version of course listings, and you may be asked to pay for postage if you would like the entire catalog. Check if your EducationUSA advising center has copies of the catalogs you need. If you do not receive, or cannot find, all the information you need, contact the international undergraduate admissions office to ask specific questions.

Send your first inquiry approximately 12 months before you plan to enroll. Give yourself sufficient time for possible delays in international mail, especially if you are posting applications or requesting information in November or December when the high volume of holiday mail in the United States can often double the length of time mail takes to reach its destination.

## Registering for Admissions Tests

If you are planning to enroll at a college in September (fall semester), take any relevant tests no later than January in the same year, and preferably earlier. (See chapter 5 for further information on testing requirements and

registration.) You should confirm with each college whether you need to take the ACT or SAT and SAT Subject Tests. Remember that you cannot take both the SAT and SAT Subject Tests on the same day, and deadlines for registration for the tests are usually five to six weeks before the actual test date. Test scores must reach universities before the application deadline date, and you should allow at least four to six weeks between the test date and the application deadline.

If English is not your native language, register to take the TOEFL or IELTS. As with the ACT and SAT, make sure your test results reach colleges before their deadline dates. If you feel that you qualify for a TOEFL or IELTS waiver, contact the universities directly and explain your circumstances. At least one month before the test dates, find out about test preparation materials and any other help you may need. Your EducationUSA advising center can give you further information.

## Completing and Returning Application Materials

Read the information you receive from colleges thoroughly. Most schools require similar information, but they may ask for it in different ways. You will usually be asked to provide the following items.

### Application Form

Your application form should be neat and clear to create a good impression. Unless specifically asked to complete the forms by hand, use a typewriter or word processor. You should fit your information into the application form provided and only use additional pages where necessary. Keep your personal information consistent, and always spell your name the same way on all documents. This will help schools keep track of your application materials more easily. Remember that large U.S. universities handle thousands of student records annually. Do not worry about providing a Social Security Number — either leave the section blank or write "none," according to the instructions. Avoid abbreviations; it is better to write the full names and addresses of your schools, employers, examinations, and awards. Always provide information about your education or employment experiences in a logical order that is either chronological or reverse chronological order, as required. You will be asked when you want to study, what level (usually "freshman" or "transfer"), and the degree you hope to re-

ceive. Remember that it is usually acceptable for you to write "undecided" in the section asking about proposed major.

## Application Fee

Almost all universities charge a non-refundable application fee that covers the cost of processing your application. It must be paid in U.S. dollars by check drawn on a U.S. bank, by international money order, or by credit card. Check the school's application form, website, or catalog for the current cost as well as acceptable forms of payment.

## Academic Credentials

Every college specifies the types of official records it requires to document past education. In U.S. terms, these are called transcripts and include a list of classes that you have taken at secondary school, when they were taken, and the grades you received for each class.

For international students, U.S. colleges sometimes provide special forms on which secondary school authorities are asked to write your grades and describe your academic performance relative to other students. If such forms are not provided, your school will still be expected to submit official documents that provide this kind of information on letterhead paper with the school stamp. If the admissions officer requests an explanation of the grading and class ranking system or descriptions of classes taken or subjects you have studied, this information should be furnished by an official of your school, if possible. U.S. admissions officers prefer that transcripts of previous educational work be sent with your application in a separate envelope sealed by your school, or sent directly from the school.

U.S. colleges will either evaluate your grades and documents themselves or pay an outside company, called a credential evaluator, to do so. They sometimes require international applicants to pay for the evaluation of documents.

In addition to a transcript, you must also send certified copies of secondary school diplomas, certificates, final examination results, or records of your performance on any national or leaving examinations administered in your home country. Do not send original documents unless there is no alternative, as usually they cannot be returned. Copies should be certified with an official seal from the school, or certified by a public official authorized to certify such documents.

If English translations are necessary, you may use the services of a professional translator, or you may translate the document yourself. Such translations must also be certified by an acceptable agency. Some EducationUSA advising centers translate and certify documents to assist you with the application process. There may be a charge for such services. Do not attempt to convert your school results and courses into U.S. terms. Instead, try to provide as much background information as possible on the grading system used and the types of diplomas, certificates, or awards granted.

## Test Score Reporting

When you apply to take the ACT, the SAT and SAT Subject Tests, TOEFL, IELTS, or other examinations, you should know to which universities you wish to apply. This way you will be able to specify right away that you wish your scores sent to those universities. You will save time and money by sending the scores at test time rather than requesting separate scores at a later date. When you submit an application, include a photocopy of your test score reports if possible. The admissions office can then more easily match the official scores with your application when they arrive, and, in some instances, they may begin processing your application with only the photocopy in hand.

## Personal Statement

> *"Don't be afraid to pour your heart out — if something is really important to you, talk about it, because that is what admissions officers want to know about you."*
>
> — Molecular biology student from Romania

Many schools ask applicants to submit a written personal statement or essay as part of the admissions process. When university admissions officers read this part of the application, they may look to see whether the student can contribute to the school and if the school can meet his or her needs. The personal statement gives universities a chance to get a personal glimpse of you, an insight that is not possible in the grades and numbers that make up the rest of your application. Colleges look for certain qualities in potential students and tailor their essay questions accordingly.

Application essays also allow admissions officers to assess your writing skills, academic ability, organizational skills, purpose in applying to the institution, and your reasons for your chosen field of study. Admissions offi-

cers look for strong writing skills, as well as a demonstration of intellectual curiosity and maturity. Write the essay far enough in advance so that you have time to put it aside for a week and then read it again to see if it still makes sense. This shows through in your essay and tells admissions officers that you are a good writer, that you care about the essay, and that you are willing to take the time to prepare it well.

Some general tips:

DO:

- Answer the question asked.
- Focus on a specific incident or event you remember well — details are important.
- Consider explaining anything unusual that has influenced your school or home life.
- Ask others to proofread it for grammatical and spelling errors.

DO NOT:

- Lie.
- Let someone else write the essay for you.
- Choose a topic merely to look good.
- Say what you think the college wants to hear; just tell the truth about your reasons for applying.
- Skip opportunities to write more about yourself.
- Write the essay (or any other part of your application) the night before it is due.

Make sure that your essay is a true representation of yourself and your abilities. The most important part of the essay is to be genuine and honest — admissions officers read several hundred essays each year and have become experts in identifying fake essays or those written by parents. The essay is your opportunity to tell the college why it should accept you over other students — use it as such.

## Recommendations

You will usually be asked for at least two letters of recommendation. These may come from the head of your school, your school counselor, your personal tutor, or teachers who know you well. Your recommenders must be able to write about your work and assess your potential to do well at college. If you know the subject in which you plan to major, have your teacher in that

subject write a recommendation. Recommendations from U.S. teachers are very positive and can be longer and more detailed than those written by teachers in other countries. Poorly written, negative, or late recommendations will reflect on your judgment in picking referees, so choose with care.

Recommendation forms may ask a list of questions or just one general question. Since recommendations carry a fair amount of weight in the admissions process, let your recommenders know about your plans and where you would like to study. A recommendation form may include a waiver where you can relinquish your right to see what is written about you. If this option is offered, most admissions officers prefer you to waive your right so that recommenders may feel more comfortable when writing their evaluations. Admissions officers usually interpret waived recommendations as more honest. If your recommendations must be sent directly from your referees, it is common courtesy to give them stamped, addressed envelopes. Also allow plenty of time for your referees to write their recommendations. Remind them to sign the sealed flap of the envelope before mailing.

## Financial Statement

Most universities include a form called a "Declaration and Certification of Finances" or "Affidavit of Financial Support" in their application packets. This must be signed by your parents, or whoever is paying your college expenses, then certified by a bank or lawyer. Keep a copy of this form since you will also need it to apply for your student visa. Schools usually need to know that you have at least the first year's expenses covered, although many may also ask you to indicate your source of income for the entire period of study. If you know when you apply that you will need some form of assistance from the college, indicate how much you plan to request from the university. Many U.S. universities use a "need-blind" admissions policy. This means that your financial position is not a consideration in the decision whether to grant you admission. Please note, however, that the university will issue the relevant certificate of eligibility for a student visa only if you are able to fully document your source(s) of income.

## Deadlines and Submission

Each university sets its own deadline date. Deadlines usually fall between January and March, although they can be as early as

November or as late as June. If a college indicates that it offers "rolling admissions," it will admit candidates until the freshman class is filled. It is nonetheless a good idea to submit your application as soon as possible.

More competitive universities have an "early decision" deadline. In this instance, you apply early, usually in November, and you can apply only to that institution. Because of your demonstrated commitment to the college, your application may be considered somewhat more favorably than those applying in the regular way. If you are accepted, you are expected to confirm that you will definitely attend this institution. If you are not accepted, you are free to apply to other institutions.

It is your responsibility to ensure that all your documents, application forms, references, and official score reports reach the universities safely and on time. Send your applications by registered mail, or by courier if you are very close to deadline dates. It is worthwhile telephoning or sending an e-mail to colleges to make sure that they have received your application package and that they have everything they require. Keep copies of your application and documents just in case your materials get lost in the mail so you can supply another set of information quickly if this should happen.

## Mid-year Admissions

Many universities will accept enrollment for any of their terms. For schools that operate on a semester calendar, mid-year admission is in January. Colleges that use a quarter or trimester system may offer admission in both the winter (January) and spring (March) terms. The precise date differs for each institution. Deadlines for mid-year admissions are usually six to nine months in advance of enrollment. If you are applying for admission in January, you should take any admissions tests at least six months beforehand.

## Interviews

Some U.S. universities and colleges are able to interview candidates outside the United States. Former students of the university (alumni) who happen to reside in a particular country usually conduct interviews. International students are not at a disadvantage if they are unable to be interviewed, but if you are offered the chance to have an interview in your country do not turn it down; it is a good opportunity to practice your communication skills,

and learn more about the school directly from a former student.

## Common Application Form

This standardized application form is available on the Internet at http://www.commonapp.org and is used by nearly 400 colleges and universities. These institutions guarantee that they will give the same consideration to the Common Application as to their own forms. A copy of the form can be downloaded from the web and may be available at your EducationUSA advising center. You can make as many copies as you need and send them to as many participating institutions as you wish. Each form lists participating colleges and universities with their addresses and admissions information. Keep in mind that while the Common Application Form simplifies the college application process, some believe that a standard form may not allow you to tailor your application to the particular features of individual colleges.

## Acceptance

If you plan to begin studies in September, you should hear from the colleges you applied to by mid-April of that year. Schools that have offered you admission may ask you to send in a deposit if you wish to accept their offer. They will probably put a limitation on how long they will keep a place open for you. If you receive more than one offer of acceptance, please notify the colleges you turn down so that they can make offers to those students still on waiting lists. We also recommend that you return unused student visa Certificates of Eligibility to those schools. Colleges usually send information on housing, health insurance, and orientation at this point.

## Review

- Decide which colleges you are interested in and write or send an e-mail message to the Director of International Undergraduate Admissions requesting information and application forms.
- Register to take the appropriate admissions tests as soon as possible.
- Read all the application materials thoroughly.
- Arrange for your school or college to produce transcripts and recommendations for each U.S. university to which you plan to apply. Check directly with individual admissions offices if you have trouble

obtaining multiple copies of official documents from your country.

- Complete and return all the application materials to the universities before their deadline dates.

## Useful Websites

The College Board
https://www.collegeboard.org/

CollegeNET
http://www.collegenet.com

CollegeView
http://www.collegeview.com

Peterson's
http://www.petersons.com

The Princeton Review
http://www.review.com

National Association of Credential Evaluation Services
http://www.naces.org

The Common Application for Undergraduate College Admission
http://www.commonapp.org

# The Application Process: A Timetable and Checklist

Below is the recommended timetable for applying to universities in the United States. It is sometimes possible to complete the process more quickly, but you may have a much more limited choice of schools. Planning well ahead gives you sufficient time to make successful applications to the colleges of your choice.

12 TO 18 MONTHS PRIOR to the academic year in which you hope to enroll, begin your research.

- What are your reasons for wanting to study in the United States?
- Which universities will meet your needs?
- Will you need financial assistance?
- Find out application and financial aid deadlines. This will affect when you take the standardized tests required for admission since test results

must reach admissions offices no later than these deadlines. The tests should be taken in advance of submitting university application forms.

- Register to take standardized tests if required by the universities to which you are applying.
- Begin narrowing down your choice of schools to approximately 10 to 20 institutions.

12 MONTHS PRIOR to enrollment, complete the following (months indicated are estimates, based on fall enrollment):

## August

- Contact universities for application and financial aid forms and catalogs.
- Obtain test registration forms or register online to take the TOEFL or IELTS, the ACT, and/or SAT and SAT Subject Tests, if necessary.

## September – December

- Request an official transcript from your school.
- Request letters of recommendation from your teachers.
- Complete application forms (for admission as well as financial aid).
- Double check that transcripts and references have been sent.
- Take the necessary admissions tests.

## January – April

- University application deadlines must be met; note that these are for regular admission — early admission deadlines will be sooner.

## April – June

- Letters of acceptance or rejection arrive. Decide which university to attend, notify the admissions office of your decision, and complete and return any forms they require.
- Send letters of regret and return unused student visa Certificates of Eligibility to those universities you turn down.
- Organize finances: arrange to transfer funds to a U.S. bank; make sure you have funds for travel and expenses on arrival.
- Finalize arrangements for housing and medical insurance with your university.

## June – August

- Use information from your Form I-20 or DS-2019 to fill out the SEVIS Form I-901 and pay the required SEVIS fee. (See chapter 11 for more information on SEVIS.)
- Upon receipt of your I-20 and SEVIS I-901 payment receipt, apply to your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for a visa (see chapter 11 for more information).
- Make travel arrangements.
- Contact the International Student Office at your university with details of your arrival plans and confirm details of any orientation for new students held by the university.

## Getting Ready to Go

Once you know that you are going to study in the United States, you will probably have questions about visas, accommodation, health insurance, banking, how to study, and other "pre-departure" information. See chapters 11 and 12 in this booklet for further information, and refer to Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*. Most EducationUSA advising centers conduct pre-departure orientation presentations in the summer, and some may also offer sessions mid-year. Contact the nearest center for the schedule and to reserve your space. Some centers may charge a fee for this service.

# Transferring to a U.S. University

An attractive feature of the U.S. higher education system is that you can transfer from one college to another midway through a degree. The flexibility of the credit system at U.S. universities allows credits earned at one institution to be recognized by another as long as certain criteria are met. Each September more than 1 million students transfer to a new college, and additional students transfer mid-year at the start of the spring semester. Many of these students transfer from community colleges to four-year colleges to complete a bachelor's degree (see chapter 3 for more information on community colleges). Others start at a four-year institution, but for personal, academic, or financial reasons decide to transfer to a different four-year college. A small number transfer from an institution outside the United States to one within the United States.

Most colleges prefer students to have completed one year of study before they enroll at the new college, but this requirement varies from school to school. In addition, most universities have a two-year residency requirement prior to graduation. This means that you must spend at least two years studying at that college in order to graduate and receive its degree. In general, most transfer students are in their sophomore or junior (second or third) year when they arrive at the new college.

## Credit Transfer

When choosing a transfer institution, consider how many of the courses you have taken will transfer from your current to your new institution. The system of recognition for work completed at the original institution is called credit transfer, and the policy and procedures for credit transfer vary considerably from institution to institution.

Colleges determine which courses they will recognize on the basis of your transcripts and other information about your original institution, course outlines, and so on. While schools can usually give an unofficial estimate at the time they issue your letter of acceptance, students must often wait until arriving at the college and meeting the head of their major department to get a final evaluation of their transfer status.

Students may find that some of the courses they took at their original institutions are "lost" in the transfer process. These students often need extra time to graduate or must take summer school combined with a heavier workload if they wish to graduate on time. In addition, most colleges have a maximum number of credits that can be transferred from a previous institution. Contact schools directly or use reference materials available at your EducationUSA advising center for further information on specific transfer policies.

Generally, students are required to take three types of courses to earn a U.S. degree: general education requirements, requirements for the major field of study, and electives (see chapter 2 for further information on these different types of courses). Courses transferred from the original institution to the transfer institution must fit into one of these three categories if they are to count toward the requirements for the degree. The following sections explain how this process works in practice.

## Transferring between U.S. Institutions

Because general education requirements are similar at many U.S. colleges, students who transfer from one U.S. institution to another are the most likely to find that their courses are recognized and transfer easily.

Transferring courses you have taken as requirements for a particular major may be more complicated, especially if you are trying to transfer courses for a major that the new college does not offer (for example, trying to transfer business courses into a school that does not offer business courses). Sometimes the courses taken for a certain major may not meet the requirements for the same major at the transfer institution. The transfer institution may even insist that you take all the course requirements for a major at that college. Courses not accepted either as credit toward the major or as general education requirements may be accepted as credit for elective courses. If even this is not possible, either no transfer credit will be granted, or the new college may tell you that it will grant transfer credit for these courses, but the credit cannot be applied toward your requirements for graduation. When investigating how many transfer credits you will receive, it is important to check and understand the distinction between general acceptance of credit for transfer purposes, and acceptance of credits to meet the requirements for graduation with a degree in a certain discipline. In the former situation, further clarification is needed, and some credits may be lost between the current and transfer institutions. In the latter situation, you can be sure exactly which courses and credits you can apply from your current institution to meet the course requirements for a certain major (for example, mathematics or history) at the transfer institution.

*The College Handbook for Transfer Students*, published by The College Board, offers suggestions for ways that students can maximize their transfer credits. Advice includes:

- Take any required general education courses during your first two years of study.
- Take any prerequisites for your major at your original institution, as these will help you get accepted into another college, particularly if your major is highly competitive.
- Plan to take the majority of the courses required for your major

after you arrive at the transfer institution, as these are more difficult to transfer.

- If you are studying at a community college, work closely with your academic adviser in planning your course schedule and take courses designated as "transfer courses" (see chapter 3 for further information on community colleges).

- You can ask a college to reconsider its decision about transfer credit. Sometimes a transcript or course description provides insufficient information to enable a college to grant credit; further information may allow administrators to make a decision in your favor.

## Transferring from Outside the U.S. Education System

Every year students transfer from other countries into U.S. degree programs and successfully go on to complete their degrees. However, the structure of degrees in other countries rarely matches the structure of U.S. degrees, making the transfer process more complicated than it is for students transferring from within the U.S. system. For example, if in your country you study only one subject for your degree, the courses you have taken will not match up with the varied subjects a U.S. undergraduate student takes to meet his or her general education requirements.

According to one senior admissions officer, the transfer institution needs to consider a number of factors when granting credit for the courses you have taken at a non-U.S. institution, including:

- Is your university or college recognized by the ministry of education in your country? U.S. colleges are looking for institutions that are recognized by a ministry of education; however, if some other authority approves your college, it may still be acceptable. Decisions vary from college to college and often depend on what the situation would be for a similar college in the United States.

- How similar is the nature or character of the courses you have taken to those offered at the transfer institution? U.S. schools usually assess similarity by looking at information from course descriptions, course outlines, or college catalogs. If your institution is not well known in the United States, the college may have to do a more detailed evaluation with you when you arrive, and only then decide whether and how to grant transfer credit.

- How applicable are your courses toward the degree and the major you wish to pursue? This will often involve evaluation of the courses by both the admissions office and the academic department to which you wish to be admitted. They will look at whether courses can be accepted for transfer credit first, and then at whether they can count toward the requirements for a specific major. Again this decision may not take place until after you have arrived, and the decision may vary from college to college. Applying courses toward a particular major is most difficult for professional programs such as engineering, architecture, or journalism, where course requirements are carefully structured and often dictated by accrediting bodies for the profession.

To make the transfer process run as smoothly as possible, you are also advised to:

- Make sure all academic records provided are official and bear the original stamp or seal of the issuing institution.

- Submit course descriptions in English for all post-secondary courses taken. Include summaries or outlines of the major topics covered in each course, the number of units or hours required in lecture and laboratory for each course on a weekly basis, the length of the term or academic year, and, if it is not given elsewhere, the year in which you took the course. (If an outline is not available, write a summary yourself and have it certified by the school as accurate.)

- Prepare a list of textbooks used in each course; this can help campus administrators better understand the content of the courses and allow them to grant credit after you arrive.

- Provide information on the total number of courses, credits, or units required for the diploma or degree program from which you are transferring.

Students who transfer into a U.S. institution may also be able to receive credit for their secondary school work if it is considered to be comparable to introductory college-level work in the United States. Ask each college about this.

## The Transfer Application Process

The application process as a transfer student takes time, and

you should begin to plan your transfer at least 12 months before the date you wish to start studying at the new institution. Carefully study the section in each college catalog on transferring. Often this will include information on the college's policy on transfer of credit. Chapter 4 of this booklet gives general advice on choosing colleges.

The application process for transfer students differs slightly from that of freshman applicants. Transfer students often fill out a separate application form, and the new college usually wants to know two main things:

- **Why do you want to transfer to this institution?** You will be asked to write a personal statement outlining your reasons for wishing to transfer. This is probably the single most important part of your application. Note that this should not be a statement of complaint about why you are unhappy at your current institution, but instead a statement of why the new school will better suit your academic needs.

- **What courses of study have you taken, or are you currently taking?** What has been your college experience so far? Transfer applicants are expected to have performed well at their current institution and to have proven themselves in higher education.

You will need to provide the same items as freshman applicants to the college, including recommendations, transcripts, admissions test scores, and an application essay. See chapter 8 for advice on how to put together a successful application.

Remember that transferring is not an easy way into the more selective universities; in fact, many of the more competitive colleges have more demanding admissions standards at the transfer level than at the freshman level. Many colleges provide statistics on the percentage of applicants accepted for both freshman and transfer admission to give applicants a sense of how competitive entry is as a transfer student.

## Review

- It is possible to transfer into a U.S. university part way through a degree, though usually only after the first year of study. You may lose some credits and need extra time to complete the degree.

- Courses required for a particular major are the most com-

plicated to transfer, especially for professional programs like engineering.

- Differences between university systems and degree programs in the United States and other countries make the transfer process more complex for students coming from institutions outside the United States.

- The transfer college will want to know as much as possible about your original institution, degree program, and courses taken in order to determine what transfer credit they will grant.

- Transfer students may have to fill out a separate application form and write an essay explaining why they want to transfer; they must also provide the same items as freshman applicants, such as admissions test scores and recommendations.

- Transfer admission can be more competitive than freshman admission, and it requires the same amount of time to research institutions and put together successful applications.

- In some cases you will not receive a final evaluation of the number of credits or time needed to complete your degree until after you arrive on campus, register for classes, and meet with the head of your department.

## Useful Websites

Please visit the websites of the individual institutions to which you plan to apply for information on transfer policies.

# Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and Student Visas

Congratulations — you have been accepted by the university of your choice! You are thinking about the courses you will take, the people you will meet, and the exciting experiences that lie ahead, but now you face two final tasks: completing the SEVIS registration process and applying for your student visa.

## Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)

SEVIS is an Internet-based system that maintains data on foreign students and exchange visitors before and during their stay in the United States. It is part of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) managed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The college you plan to attend will begin the SEVIS process for you by entering basic information about you, your program, how you plan to finance your studies, and the program dates. Your program will send you a Form I-20 or a Form DS-2019, depending on the type of visa you intend to seek. You must pay a SEVIS I-901 fee and complete this form before your visa interview. For more detailed information about SEVIS, see Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*.

## Visa Types

The most common student visa is the F-1, although a small number of students travel to the United States on an M-1 visa if they

are undertaking a program of hands-on technical or vocational training, or on a J-1 visa if they are participating in an exchange visitor program.

## Procedures for Your Country

Procedures for applying for a student visa vary from country to country. Refer to the website of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you intend to apply for your visa for authoritative post-specific information on the visa application process. Your nearest EducationUSA advising center can also provide valuable information on the application process in your country. If possible, attend an EducationUSA pre-departure orientation program; it will almost certainly include information on applying for a visa.

There are several things you can do to help the visa application process go smoothly:

- Start the process as soon as you receive your Form I-20 (your visa can be issued as early as 120 days before your report date).
- Assemble all the required documentation and any supplementary information that may help you demonstrate your qualifications.
- Make sure you are well prepared for your interview.

## Applying for a Student Visa: A Step-by-Step Guide

To apply for a visa, you must first have been accepted by a SEVP-certified school or a Department of State-approved J-1 Exchange Visitor program and have received a SEVIS-generated document (either a Form I-20 or Form DS-2019) issued by the institution or program. You will be required to present this form when you apply for a visa.

The U.S. academic institution or program sponsor will provide you with the appropriate SEVIS-generated form once you have been admitted to the institution or accepted as a participant in an exchange program. The institution or program sponsor will send you additional information about applying for your visa, including information about paying the SEVIS fee.

When your form arrives, check the following:

- Is your name spelled correctly and exactly as it appears on your passport? (Be sure to use the same spelling on your visa application as well.)
- Is the other information correct: date and country of birth, degree program, reporting date,

completion date, and financial information?

- Is it signed by a college official?
- Has the reporting date ("student must report no later than…") passed? If so, the form has expired and may no longer be used. Contact the Designated School Official (DSO) or Responsible Officer (RO) at your school or program to request another.

To apply for your visa:

- Pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. (All students and exchange visitors must pay this fee. To pay this fee, go to https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/.)
- Complete the online DS-160 visa application form and print the confirmation page.
- Pay the Machine Readable Visa (MRV) application fee, according to post-specific procedures, and obtain a receipt for the MRV fee.

(You will need all the above information to make your visa interview appointment.)

Follow the post-specific procedures on the embassy or consulate website to make your appointment.

Before you attend your visa appointment, gather your documents: the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019, the I-901 receipt, the DS-160 confirmation page, the MRV fee receipt, your passport (which must be valid for at least six months), and your financial documentation.

The visa interview is often no longer than a few minutes, so you must be brief and articulate. Be confident and do not hide the truth or lie. Think of this as an opportunity to tell "your story."

To issue your visa, the consular officer must be satisfied on three counts:

- **First, are you a bona fide student?** The officer may consider your educational background and current and future plans. Be prepared to discuss the reasons you chose a particular college, your anticipated major, and your career plans. Bring school transcripts, national examination results, graduate admissions or English-language test scores, and anything else that demonstrates your academic preparation.
- **Second, how will you finance your education?** The U.S. government needs assurances that you will not drop out of school or take a job illegally. Your

Form I-20 will list how you have shown the university you intend to cover your expenses for at least the first year.

If you are being sponsored by your family or by an individual, how can you show that your sponsor is able to finance your education? Be prepared to explain how your sponsor will meet your financial requirements and why your sponsor has agreed to do so.

Be prepared to provide evidence of your sponsor's finances, especially sources and amounts of income.

- **Third, what do you intend to do upon the completion of your studies or your exchange visitor program?** Consular officers are required by U.S. law to consider all applicants for nonimmigrant visas as intending immigrants until the applicant demonstrates to the satisfaction of the consular officer that he/she is entitled to the nonimmigrant visa status he/she is seeking.

  You should be prepared to demonstrate sufficient economic, family, and social ties to your place of residence to ensure that your stay in the United States will be temporary. Economic ties include your family's economic position, property you own or stand to inherit, and your own economic potential when you come home with a U.S. education. You may wish to present evidence of your career planning and your knowledge of how you can apply your U.S. education in your country's local employment scene.

## Visa Refusals

If your application is refused, the consular officer is required to provide in writing the section of the law under which the visa is refused. If your visa is refused under section 214(b), you may reapply when you can provide new, more complete information that demonstrates your qualification for the visa you are seeking. If your visa is refused under section 221(g) for administrative processing, listen carefully to the instructions the consular officer will give you so that you understand what you need to do next.

If you have given careful thought to your educational goals and if you have realistic career plans, you will find the visa application is an opportunity to prove you are ready to take the next big step in your education and your life: studying at a university in the United States.

## Review

- Most students enter the United States on an F-1 visa, but some may travel on a J-1 or M-1 visa.
- Familiarize yourself with the application process for your country and prepare your application thoroughly and well in advance.
- Before applying, check that the Form I-20 or Form DS-2019 you received from your university or program is valid and correct.
- Pay the I-901 fee and print the receipt.
- Complete the online visa application Form DS-160. Print the confirmation page of the Form DS-160.
- Pay the MRV application fee according to post-specific procedures shown at the embassy or consulate website.
- Make your visa interview appointment following post-specific procedures.
- Take all required and any supplementary documents to your interview.
- Ensure that you can demonstrate to the consular officer that you are a bona fide student, can finance your education, and have strong ties to your home country.
- If your application is refused, you can apply again, but you must provide fresh evidence to overcome the reason for the first refusal.

## Useful Websites

U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs website – general information on visas and specific information for students and exchange visitors
Travel.State.Gov

U.S. Department of Homeland Security website
StudyintheStates.dhs.gov

# U.S. University Life

Once you have secured your place at a U.S. college, it is time to begin making plans for your new life as an international student in the United States. Although there are a few things you cannot do until you have obtained your visa, much planning can be done ahead of time to make the move to the United States run more smoothly.

This chapter highlights a few of the main areas to think about and what to expect when you arrive in the United States. Detailed pre-departure advice is available at your nearest EducationUSA advising center or in Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*.

## Arrival in the United States

Once you have been admitted to a university, have notified them of your acceptance, and paid any tuition deposit required, you should receive further information about your new school and the procedures for your arrival on campus. This should include details of the best way to reach the campus. Plan to arrive on a weekday, if possible, when the school's administrative offices are open.

## Orientation

Many U.S. universities hold arrival orientations for new international students to familiarize them with the campus and its facilities and to help them adjust to life in the United States. The orientation lasts up to one week and may be optional, but you are strongly advised to attend. It will cover a variety of useful topics: how to use the library, health center, and other university facilities; academic regulations, expectations, and support services; how to register for classes; U.S. culture and social life, culture shock, and adjusting to life in the United States; local services; visa and legal regulations; and others. All of this information will help you integrate more easily into life as a student in the United States. At the orientation you will also get to know other international students on campus and the staff who handle matters relating to international students at the college — usually known as international student advisers (see below).

## International Student Advisers (ISAs)

U.S. universities that regularly admit international students have special staff assigned and trained to work with them. They are usually called international student advisers (ISAs) or foreign student advisers (FSAs). You can ask these staff members questions related to your status as an international student or seek their help if you have problems or concerns. They may also organize social and cultural events for international students throughout the year along with the International Student Office.

## Academic Adviser (AA)

In addition to your ISA, you will be assigned an academic adviser (AA), usually a faculty member in your major field (if you have specified one). You usually meet with your AA before registering for classes for advice on what classes to take to fulfill graduation and specialization requirements. You can meet with your AA regularly to discuss your academic plans, queries, and progress.

## University Housing

Most U.S. universities expect freshmen to live on campus. This means you will almost certainly share a room in a university dormitory or apartment with at least one other student. Some housing offices require students to complete a questionnaire to help best match them with a roommate. Rooms are furnished and usually equipped with a telephone line. Bathroom facilities are usually

shared. If off-campus housing is available, you might choose to move out of university housing after your first year.

A distinctive feature of U.S. university housing is special-interest housing organized around particular academic areas, cultural backgrounds, or leisure interests. You may want to consider this option after your freshman year. For example, on a U.S. campus you might find an international student house, a German language house, an African-American house, or an environmental house.

## Money and Banking

The United States has national, regional, state, and city-based banks. Some universities have their own credit unions or other banking services. Before opening an account find out which banks are near where you will be living and studying. It may also be hard to open an account from overseas. Make sure you bring enough money with you to live on until you can open an account and arrange for funds to be transferred from home.

## Health Insurance

As an international student you must have health insurance coverage while in the United States. It is compulsory to take out health insurance at most U.S. universities, either through a university policy or by purchasing your own policy that meets the university's requirements. Health insurance policies vary; your international student adviser can explain them and help you decide on the best policy for you. Don't forget to make sure you are insured for the journey from your home country to your campus in the United States.

## Extracurricular Activities

> *"On campus I joined the football club, which was probably the best thing I've ever done as it enabled me to make friends quickly, and to travel for virtually free across the United States."*
>
> — Chemistry student from the United Kingdom

A variety of organizations and activities await you on most campuses, and getting involved is a great way to meet new friends. You may find student-run radio and TV stations, newspapers, sports teams, and social clubs that are looking for new members. U.S. universities usually have an international society, or you might consider joining a fraternity or sorority (See chapter 4,

"College Environment," for more information on fraternities and sororities). Most campuses have a Student Activities Office that can tell you what is happening on campus.

## Review

- Once you know you have a place at a U.S. university, start reading Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*.
- Plan to arrive at the university in time to attend the international student orientation.
- Get to know the international student advisers (ISAs) who organize events for international students and can help with problems or concerns.
- Your academic adviser (AA) will advise you regarding academic questions and the requirements for your degree.
- Contact the housing office on campus as soon as you know which college you will attend. You will almost certainly live in a shared room on campus during your first year, though after that there will be more housing options available.
- Make sure you bring enough money with you to live on until you can open a bank account and transfer funds from home.
- International students must have health insurance coverage from when they leave their home country until they return. Check with the university about the specific requirements for coverage.
- The Student Activities Office on campus can tell you about student organizations at the university. Getting involved will help you meet people and adjust to life in the United States.

## Useful Websites

*Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*
Available on the EducationUSA website (https://www.educationusa.info/5_steps_to_study/resources_documents.php#top)

America.gov — American Life
http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/

# Glossary of Terms

**Academic Adviser (AA):** A member of a college faculty who helps and advises students solely on academic matters.

**Academic Year:** The period of formal instruction, usually September to May; may be divided into terms of varying lengths — semesters, trimesters, or quarters.

**Accreditation:** Approval of colleges and universities by nationally recognized professional associations or regional accrediting bodies.

**ACT University-Entrance Exam:** A multiple-choice test of English, math, reading, and science reasoning (plus an optional writing component) used for admission into undergraduate programs.

**Add/Drop:** A process at the beginning of a term whereby students can delete and add classes with an instructor's permission.

**Advance Registration:** A process of choosing classes in advance of other students.

**Affidavit of Support:** An official document proving a promise of funding from an individual or organization.

**Assistantship:** A study grant of financial assistance to a graduate student that is offered in return for certain services in teaching or laboratory supervision as a teaching assistant, or for services in research as a research assistant.

**Associate Degree:** The degree awarded after a two-year period of study; it can be either terminal (vocational) or transfer (the first two years of a bachelor's degree).

**Attestation:** Official affirmation that a degree or transcript is genuine. Usually signed by a recognized expert or witness.

**Audit:** To take a class without receiving credit toward a degree.

**Authentication:** Process of determining whether something is, in fact, what it is declared to be. Incoming students are often required to provide a document of authentication for academic transcripts or previous degrees when applying to a program of study in the United States.

**Bachelor's Degree:** Degree awarded upon completion of approximately four years of full-time study in the liberal arts and sciences or professional subjects.

**Class Rank:** A number or ratio indicating a student's academic standing in his or her graduating class. A student who ranks first in a class of 100 students would report his or her class rank as 1/100, while a student ranking last would report 100/100. Class rank may also be expressed in percentiles (for example, the top 25 percent, the lower 50 percent).

**Coed:** A college or university that admits both men and women; also refers to a dormitory that houses both men and women.

**College:** A postsecondary institution that provides an undergraduate education and, in some cases, master's level degrees. College, in a separate sense, is a division of a university; for example, College of Business.

**College Catalog:** An official publication giving information about a university's academic programs, facilities, entrance requirements, and student life.

**Core Requirements:** Mandatory courses required for completion of the degree.

**Course:** Regularly scheduled class sessions of one to five hours (or more) per week during a term. A degree program is made up of a specified number of required and elective courses and varies from institution to institution.

**Credits:** Units that universities use to record the completion of courses (with passing grades) that are required for an academic degree. The catalog defines the number and kinds of credits that are required for the university's degrees and states the value of each course offered in terms of "credit hours" or "units."

**Day Student:** A student who lives in accommodations that are not administered by the college and are off the campus grounds. He or she travels to campus every day for classes.

**Degree:** Diploma or title conferred by a college, university, or professional school upon completion of a prescribed program of studies.

**Department:** Administrative subdivision of a school, college, or university through which instruction in a certain field of study is given (such as English department or history department).

**Designated School Official (DSO):** A Designated School Official (DSO) is the person on campus who gathers and reports information on international students to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and assists international students in the visa and employment authorization process. Your DSO's name will be listed on your I-20 or DS-2019.

**Dissertation:** Thesis written on an original topic of research, usually presented as one of the final requirements for a doctoral degree (Ph.D.).

**Doctorate (Ph.D.):** The highest academic degree conferred by a university to students who have completed at least three years of graduate study beyond the bachelor's and/or master's degree and who have demonstrated their academic ability in oral and written examinations and through original research presented in the form of a dissertation.

**Dormitories:** Housing facilities on the campus of a college or university reserved for students. A typical dormitory would include student rooms, bathrooms, common rooms, and possibly a cafeteria. Also known as "dorms" for short.

**Electives:** Courses that students choose to take for credit toward their intended degree, as distinguished from courses that they are required to take.

**Extracurricular Activities:** Nonacademic activities undertaken outside university courses.

**Faculty:** People who teach courses at U.S. colleges and universities. Faculty members may include professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and instructors.

**Fees:** An amount charged by universities, in addition to tuition, to cover costs of institutional services.

**Fellowship:** A form of financial assistance, usually awarded to a graduate student. Generally, no service is required of the student in return.

**Final Exam:** Often referred to as a "final," a final exam is a cumulative exam on a particular course subject encompassing all material covered throughout the duration of the course.

**Financial Aid:** A general term that includes all types of money, loans, and work/study programs offered to a student to help pay tuition, fees, and living expenses.

**Fraternities:** Male social, academic, and philanthropic organizations found on many U.S. campuses.

**Freshman:** A first-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

**Grade/Grading System:** The evaluation of a student's academic work.

**Grade Point Average (GPA):** A system of recording achievement based on a numerical average of the grades attained in each course.

**Graduate:** A student who has completed a course of study, either at secondary school or college level. A graduate program at a university is a study course for students who already hold a bachelor's degree.

**High School:** The U.S. term for secondary school.

**Honors Program:** A challenging program for students with high grades.

**International English Language Testing System (IELTS):** An English language proficiency examination of applicants whose native language is not English.

**International Student Adviser (ISA):** The person at a university who is in charge of providing information and guidance to foreign students in areas of government regulation, visas, academic regulations, social customs, language, financial or housing problems, travel plans, insurance, and legal matters.

**Junior:** A third-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

**Liberal Arts:** A term referring to academic studies of subjects in the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences, with the goal of developing students' verbal, written, and reasoning skills.

**Maintenance:** Refers to the expenses of attending a university, including room (living quarters) and board (meals), books, clothing, laundry, local transportation, and incidentals.

**Major:** The subject in which a student wishes to concentrate.

**Master's Degree:** Degree awarded upon completion of academic requirements that usually include a minimum of one year's study beyond the bachelor's degree.

**Midterm Exam:** An exam administered after half the academic term has passed that covers all class material up until that point.

**Minor:** A subject in which the student takes the second greatest concentration of courses.

**Non-resident Student:** A student who does not meet the residence requirements of the state. Tuition fees and admission policies may differ for residents and non-residents. International students are usually classified as non-residents, and there is little possibility of changing to resident status at a later date for tuition purposes. Also referred to as an "out of state" student.

**Notarization:** The certification of a document (or a statement or signature) as authentic and true by a public official (known in the United States as a "notary public") or a lawyer who is also a commissioner of oaths.

**Placement Test:** An examination used to test a student's academic ability in a certain field so that he or she may be placed in the appropriate courses in that field. In some cases, a student may be given academic credit based on the results of a placement test.

**Prerequisites:** Programs or courses that a student is required to complete before being permitted to enroll in a more advanced program or course.

**Registration:** Process through which students select courses to be taken during a quarter, semester, or trimester.

**Resident Assistant (RA):** A person who assists the residence hall director in campus dormitories and is usually the first point of contact for students with problems or queries regarding dorm life. RAs are usually students at the college who receive free accommodation and other benefits in return for their services.

**Scholarship:** A study grant of financial aid, usually given at the undergraduate level, that may take the form of a waiver of tuition and/or fees.

**SAT:** A primarily multiple-choice test of mathematics and English that is used for admission into an undergraduate program.

**School:** A term that usually refers to elementary, middle, or secondary school. Also used in place of the words "college," "university," or "institution," or as a general term for any place of education; for example, law school or graduate school.

**Semester:** Period of study lasting approximately 15 to 16 weeks or one-half the academic year.

**Senior:** A fourth-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

**Social Security Number (SSN):** A number issued to people by the U.S. government for payroll deductions for old age, survivors, and disability insurance. Anyone who works regularly must obtain a Social Security Number. Many institutions use this number as the student identification number.

**Sophomore:** A second-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

**Sororities:** Female social, academic, and philanthropic organizations found on many U.S. campuses.

**Special Student:** A student who is taking classes but is not enrolled in a degree program.

**Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS):** An Internet-based system that maintains data on foreign students and exchange visitors before and during their stay in the United States. It is part of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) managed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

**Syllabus:** An outline of topics covered in an academic course.

**Teaching Assistant (TA):** A graduate student who acts as instructor for an undergraduate course in his or her field, in return for some form of financial aid from the university.

**Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):** An English language proficiency examination of applicants whose native language is not English.

**Thesis:** A written work containing the results of research on a specific topic prepared by a candidate for a bachelor's or master's degree.

**Transcripts:** A certified copy (see "Notarization") of a student's educational record.

**Transfer:** The process of moving from one university to another to complete a degree.

**Tuition:** The money an institution charges for instruction and training (does not include the cost of books).

**University:** A large postsecondary institution that offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

**Zip Code:** A series of numbers in mailing addresses that designates postal delivery districts in the United States.

# Additional Resources

Contact your nearest EducationUSA advising center to find out more about these and other resources.

## General Guides to Colleges

*Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*. Published annually. Barron's Educational Series, Hauppauge, NY.

*The College Board Book of Majors*. Published annually. The College Board, New York, NY.

*The College Board College Handbook*. Published annually. The College Board, New York, NY.

*The College Board International Student Handbook*. Published annually. The College Board, New York, NY.

*The College Solution: A Guide for Everyone Looking for the Right School at the Right Price*. 2008. Lynn O'Shaughnessy, FT Press, Upper Saddle River, NJ.

*Peterson's Colleges and Universities in the U.S.A. — The Complete Guide for International Students*. 1998. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*Peterson's Four-Year Colleges*. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*Peterson's Guide to Distance Learning Programs*. 2005. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*Peterson's Two-Year Colleges*. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*Peterson's Vocational and Technical Schools Set*. 2008. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

## Choosing and Applying to U.S. Universities

*101 Ways to Become the Perfect College Applicant*. 2007. Jeanine LeNy, Kaplan, Inc., New York, NY.

*The Best 371 Colleges, 2010 Edition*, 2009. Princeton Review Publishing, LLC, New York, NY.

*Brody's Guide to the College Admissions Essay*. 2005. Jay Brody and Toby Stock, iUniverse, Lincoln, NE.

*Choose the Right College and Get Accepted*. 2003. Students Helping Students, Prentice Hall Press, New York, N.Y.

*The College Handbook for Transfer Students*. 1999. The College Board, New York, NY. (out of print)

*Do It Write: How to Prepare a Great College Application*. 2009. G. Gary Ripple, Octameron Associates, Alexandria, VA.

*Get It Together for College: A Planner to Help You Get Organized and Get In*. 2008. The College Board, New York, NY.

*Going To College: Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities*. 2005. Elizabeth Evans Getzel and Paul Wehman, Brookes Publishing, Baltimore, MD.

*Goof-Proof College Admissions Essays*. 2003. LearningExpress, LLC, New York, NY.

*McGraw-Hill's Writing an Outstanding College Application Essay*. 2005. Estelle Rankin and Barbara Murphy, The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., New York, NY.

*Peterson's Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders*. 1997. Charles T. Mangrum and Stephen S. Strichart, Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*US News and World Report America's Best Colleges*. Published annually. US News and World Report, Washington, DC.

*Writing a Winning College Application Essay*. 1996. Wilma Davidson and Susan McCloskey, Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

## Financial Aid

*The Athletic Recruiting & Scholarship Guide*. 2005. Wayne Mazzoni, Mazz Marketing, Inc., Black Rock, CT.

*The College Board Scholarship Handbook*. Published annually. The College Board, New York, NY.

*Funding for United States Study 2007-2008: A Guide for International Students and Professionals*. 2007. Daniel Obst, Editor, Institute of International Education, New York, NY.

*Peterson's Scholarships and College Athletic Programs*. 2004. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*Peterson's Scholarships for Study in the USA and Canada*. 1999. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

*Princeton Review: Student Athlete's Guide to College*. 1999. Hilary Abramson, Princeton Review Publishing, LLC, New York, NY.

*Student Athlete Handbook for the 21st Century: A Guide to Recruiting, Scholarships, and Prepping for College*. 2006. Christine Grimes, Lulu Enterprises, Inc., Raleigh, NC.

## Pre-Departure Guides

*Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States* (Booklet Four of this series), available on the Internet at http://www.educationusa.state.gov

*International Student's Guide to the USA*. 1998. Ian Jacobs and Ellen Shatswell, Princeton Review Publishing, LLC, New York, NY.

*NAFSA's International Student Handbook: The Essential Guide to University Study in the USA*. 2001. NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Washington, DC.

*The Ultimate College Survival Guide*. 2009. Janet Farrar Worthington and Ronald Farrar, Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

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