

## **WHY STUDY IN THE U.S.?**

### **Information Guide for International students considering studying in the U.S.**

More than 600,000 students from around the world choose to study in the United States every year

### **Why study in the U.S.?**

1. Worldwide recognition of U.S. degrees as the best degrees.
2. Employers favor U.S. degrees
3. Wide range of educational programs
4. Outstanding facilities, libraries and laboratories
5. Diverse student body
6. Opportunity to spend an additional year in the U.S. getting valuable, relevant work experience

### **U.S. System of Education**

#### **Bachelor's degrees**

Most bachelor's degree programs can be completed in four years of full-time study. Each year, over one million bachelor degrees are granted at almost 3,500 colleges and universities across the United States, in many different fields of study.

#### **Master's degrees**

A master's degree can be completed in two years of study following the bachelor's degree. Master's programs often require a major research paper in addition to coursework.

#### **Doctoral degrees**

Doctoral programs require an additional three to five years of study beyond the master's degree. They are the highest degrees awarded and require coursework as well as original research and a dissertation.

#### **Professional degrees**

Medicine, dentistry and veterinary studies are 4 year programs following the 4 year bachelor degree course. Admission to first professional degree programs in medicine or veterinary medicine is extremely competitive—it is almost impossible for non-U.S. students to enter. If you are interested in these fields, we encourage you to apply for non-clinical programs only.

Professional degrees in engineering, pharmacy or architecture can be earned through undergraduate study (though degrees in these challenging fields often require five or six years to complete rather than the typical four years). It is also possible to enter these professions through graduate study.

### **Unique Features of the U.S. System**

#### **Accreditation**

The U.S. uses a rigorous and complex system of monitored self-study by six regional accrediting bodies to determine whether or not an institution is "accredited." This is the word used in the U.S. to connote "recognized" or "approved."

#### **College and University**

In the United States, colleges and universities are ALWAYS postsecondary (past high school) institutions. Americans use the terms "college" and "university" interchangeably, and a degree from a

college is equivalent to a degree from a university. In fact, some of the most selective institutions in the U.S. are colleges.

HINT: Don't let the name "college" make you think your institution is less reputable or qualified than a "university."

The major differences are that colleges tend to have smaller student bodies, focus on undergraduate education and hire professors for their teaching abilities. Universities tend to be larger, offer undergraduate and graduate programs and hire faculty to teach and conduct research.

HINT: Whether U.S. institutions are public or private does not tell anything about their quality - excellent colleges and universities are common in both categories.

### **Public and Private Universities**

The U.S. has a great variety of strong public and private universities. The oldest universities (Harvard, Yale, Princeton) were and still are private. Funding comes from tuition, grants for research, and voluntary contributions. Public institutions are state-controlled and give preference to in-state students. They tend to be less expensive, but usually assess added out-of-state fees to students from other states and countries.

### **Credit System**

Progress toward graduation in the U.S. is measured through the accumulation of credits, rather than in years as in many other countries. Each course/class you successfully complete is worth a certain number of credits and a determined number of credits is required for graduation.

### **Ability to transfer from one university to another**

The credit system allows students to "take their credits" from one undergraduate program to another, or from a two-year college to a four-year college, and not have to begin over again at the beginning. However, each university determines how much credit they will grant for previous work and how much of that credit will fulfill their requirements.

### **Ability to change major fields of study**

"Changing majors" after enrollment is a common practice among undergraduate students. Changing a major may mean more time is needed to complete the requirements of the new field before being eligible to graduate, but it does give students the opportunity to move into the program best suited to their needs and abilities.

HINT: While there are many universities that will be able to give you a degree, it is well worth your time and effort to find ones that truly match your ability, personality, budget, and goals.

## **Selecting a University**

Important things to consider include:

### **Academic program**

There are more than 600 major fields of study in the U.S., and no university offers every one of them. You will want to be sure that the university you select offers the academic program you want. This is less important for first-year undergraduate students who can change majors or institutions than it is for

undergraduate students who are interested in specialized fields that require heavy course work or admission to the particular department (for example, some programs in music, architecture, or engineering) or for graduate students. The more focused you are on your academic goal, the easier it will be to select a university.

**Selectivity**

The U.S. has some universities that accept a very small percentage of those that apply and others that accept most applicants. Your task is to assess your academic ability (your rank in class, your school grades, and your scores on standardized tests can help you with this), learn about the selectivity of U.S. universities, and identify universities that will be appropriate for you. Costs range from about US\$20,000 to US\$50,000 per year for tuition, fees, housing, books, insurance, and living costs.

**Size**

Universities vary in size of student body widely; they may have 800 students or 40,000. At the smaller institutions, you will get to know many of the students and professors. At the larger institutions, you'll have a greater range of course offerings and extra-curricular activities, but less personal attention.

**Location**

Universities can be found in quiet rural communities, orderly suburban locations, and cosmopolitan urban areas. While some students thrive on busy, crowded, hectic cities, others prefer quieter, calmer environments.

**Climate**

The U.S. is a large country with many different types of geography: deserts, coastal areas, mountainous regions, tropical climates, and flat plains. Some parts of the U.S. have four distinct seasons (winter, fall, spring, summer) and others have more moderate temperatures all year long.

**Character**

Each college or university has its own personality depending on its size, location, course and extracurricular offerings, selectivity, history, and student body.

**Submitting a Winning Application**

A winning application is one that clearly and neatly provides ALL of the documents requested by the deadline date and gives the admissions office an accurate picture of who you are as a student. HINT: The university will file all of the correspondence about you by LAST NAME (or FAMILY NAME) and then by FIRST NAME (or GIVEN NAME). It is critical that all correspondence (application, test scores, letters of recommendation) be submitted with your LAST NAME capitalized or underlined and with the spelling and order of your names the same in every document. Many applications have been considered incomplete and not processed because some pieces of correspondence were filed under one name and some under another.

Most universities require:

1. Application for Admission –each university has its own application form.

2. Application fee – these range from about US\$0-\$150 and are non-refundable. (many online applications have no fee)
3. Official transcripts – grades must be provided as original copies from the schools/universities you have attended if at all possible (otherwise provide a certified true copy of the originals), with a translation in English
4. Statement of financial resources – proof that you have the financial resources to attend the institution
5. Proof of English proficiency – this condition is usually met by the results of the TOEFL exam with test results sent to the college or university directly from the testing agency. Some schools will accept the IELTS exam.
6. Personal essay – this is your opportunity to express yourself in English and to describe yourself/your goals/your background in a way that goes beyond the test scores and transcripts you submit. Essays and personal statements **MUST** be written by you, though you can ask others to read your drafts and provide comments to help you revise.
7. Additional standardized test scores – undergraduate students are often asked to submit test scores from the SAT and SAT II; graduate students are often asked to submit scores from the GRE; MBA candidates are usually required to take the GMAT test.
8. Letters of recommendation – universities generally provide forms for you to give to teachers, professors, or counselors (people who know you and your strengths in a classroom setting) asking for their opinions about you. Business schools, especially, may also be interested in letters from employers focusing on your professional skills and accomplishments.

## **Financing Your U.S. Study**

### **Plan ahead**

While it is expensive to study in the United States, please remember that

1. The value of your U.S. degree is worth the investment
2. There is no correlation between the level of tuition and the quality of an institution
3. Costs vary widely from university to university and place to place
4. Planning for financing your study should be done before you submit your applications to the university
5. Pay attention to deadlines for admission as well as university-sponsored scholarships, if any.

## Calculating expenses

1. Tuition – the cost of instruction is generally charged as a single amount for the term (semester/quarter). Some universities, and many graduate programs, base their fees on the number of credits students take
2. Fees -
  - health insurance
  - student activity fee that gives students access to the library, health center and campus activities
  - Out-of-state fees charged by public universities to ALL students who cannot prove they are residents of that particular State.
3. Living Costs
  - Room and board, transportation, books and supplies

## Sources of funding

1. Personal & family funds. Talk with your family about how much money they can give you for your education.
2. Private sponsors. In most cases, you will have to have a connection with the sponsoring organization (local company, Rotary Club, religious group) for them to sponsor your studies
3. Loans. Loans come from government banks or private sector banks. A guarantor may be required. Interest rates are low and repayment begins after graduation.
4. Employment. Current immigration regulations permit non-U.S. citizens to work part-time (less than 20 hours a week) on campus. These jobs (in the cafeteria, bookstore, library, etc.) will give you some spending money.

## Financial Assistance from U.S. Colleges and Universities

1. While the terms "scholarships" and "financial aid" are often used interchangeably, there is a technical difference.
2. A scholarship is a financial award based on merit, special talent and/or leadership qualities. In most instances, colleges and universities only offer scholarships to outstanding students.
3. Financial aid is based on financial need that must be documented. Only the most prestigious, competitive and wealthy U.S. universities are able to offer significant funding for outstanding students.
5. Most public and private universities do not offer scholarships to international students.

## Graduate Awards

Graduate awards come directly from the departments rather than the university and they fall into three categories:

1. Merit Awards - for students with exceptional academic ability
2. Research Assistantships – for students who will conduct research during their stay
3. Teaching Assistantships – for students who will teach sections of undergraduate courses. For these awards, the ability to speak and teach American students in English is essential.

### **Reduce Your Educational Costs**

1. Look for "best buys"; i.e., colleges and universities that offer a quality education at a reasonable cost.
2. Consider public universities
3. Earn transfer credit locally and shorten your stay in the U.S.
4. Study in parts of the country where the living costs are lower.

### **Testing Issues**

Most universities require the results from U.S. standardized tests.

### **English Proficiency**

If your native language is NOT English and/or you do not have a degree from a university in an English-speaking country, you will be asked to provide evidence of English proficiency. Most universities require scores from TOEFL while some universities administer their own test upon arrival on campus, and a growing number of universities are accepting the scores from the IELTS.

*TOEFL*-The Test of English as a Foreign Language measures the ability of nonnative speakers of English to use and understand North American English as it is used in college and university settings. Many universities have a minimum score required entrance to the academic program. The test is offered on computer throughout most regions of the world. For further info, visit <http://www.toefl.org/>.

### **Undergraduate Exams**

Find out what the institutions that you want to apply to requires. In general, students applying to selective universities and/or engineering programs should sit for the SAT I. Some institutions also accept the ACT, another U.S. standardized test.

*The SAT I: Reasoning Test*- The SAT measures your verbal reasoning, critical reading, and math problem solving skills. It indicates how well you can apply the skills in these areas that you've developed both in and out of school.

### **Graduate Tests**

Again, check with the programs to which you plan to apply to find out what your testing options are.

1. GRE: Graduate Record Examination .GRE General Test measures verbal, quantitative, and analytical skills that have been developed over a long period of time and are not necessarily related to any particular field of study.
2. GMAT: Graduate Management Admissions Test The GMAT was designed to help business schools assess the qualifications of applicants for advanced study in business and management. It measures basic verbal, quantitative, and writing skills that are developed over a long period of time and is available year-round at test centers throughout the world. For details, go to <http://www.gmac.com/GMAT/index.shtml>.

## **Visa Matters**

Citizens of other countries who are coming to the United States to study are required to obtain a student visa. This visa will be issued by the U.S. Embassy or Consulate.

To obtain a student visa, you must demonstrate that you:

1. Have the ability and intention to pursue a course of full-time study. This can be demonstrated by official acceptance from the college or university that you wish to attend. Visa officers will also want to see transcripts and test scores or discuss your plans further.

**HINT:** Be prepared to tell the visa officer what you want to study, where you want to study, how you are going to finance your stay in the United States, and what you intend to do with your degree when you return to your home country. Be prepared to do this clearly and quickly.

2. Possess adequate funds to cover all of the costs listed by the university on the I-20 or IAP-66 form that they will send to you when you are accepted. These costs include tuition, fees, living expenses, and incidental expenses. As a general rule, the consular official will want to see the documentation for first year's expenses and documentation showing how the money will be found for future years.
3. Have sufficiently strong social, economic, and other reasons to leave the United States upon completion of the projected program of studies. Such reasons can be shown during the visa interview, by such means as showing strong family ties in your home country and/or excellent employment prospects when you return home with a U.S. degree.
4. Are able to articulate your reason for studying at a specific institution.

## **Timing**

Applicants for U.S. student visas must apply for their visas no earlier than 90 days before the date when they must report to the school in the United States. You will, however, want to apply as early as possible to allow time for processing your application.

## **Application Timetable**

The U.S. academic year begins in late August or early September (Fall), and many universities will also accept applications for January (Spring) admission. The following is the preferred timetable for applying to U.S. universities, beginning the year before an August entry.

**June-August (11<sup>th</sup> grade)**

1. Think about your educational future and career prospects at home
2. Talk with your family about financial resources
3. Register for tests such as the TOEFL, SAT, SATII, ACT, GRE, or GMAT

**August-November**

Take entrance tests if applicable. Submit applications for admission to your schools of choice. Pay careful attention to deadline dates

**December-March**

Check on your application status, in case you are missing any credentials. Maintain communication with the international admissions counselor.

**April-July**

1. Letters of acceptance or rejection arrive along with I-20 immigration document
2. Read acceptance letters carefully. Many institutions require a separate application for housing.
3. Choose the university you want to attend and submit the required deposit.
4. Send letters of regret to universities you will not attend.
5. Seek information about applying for a visa

**June-July**

1. Apply for a student visa with the I-20 of the institution you will attend.
2. Make travel arrangements

**August**

Arrive in time to attend the university's orientation program for new students

Be prepared for an excellent academic experience!