IF YOU WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

BOOK 1

UNDERGRADUATE STUDY

education USA

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IF YOU WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

Booklet 1

Undergraduate Study

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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. All four booklets may be downloaded from the World Wide Web at: http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/, and print copies of Booklets One, Two, and Three are available from U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide (see page 12 to find your nearest center).

The four booklets cover the following areas:

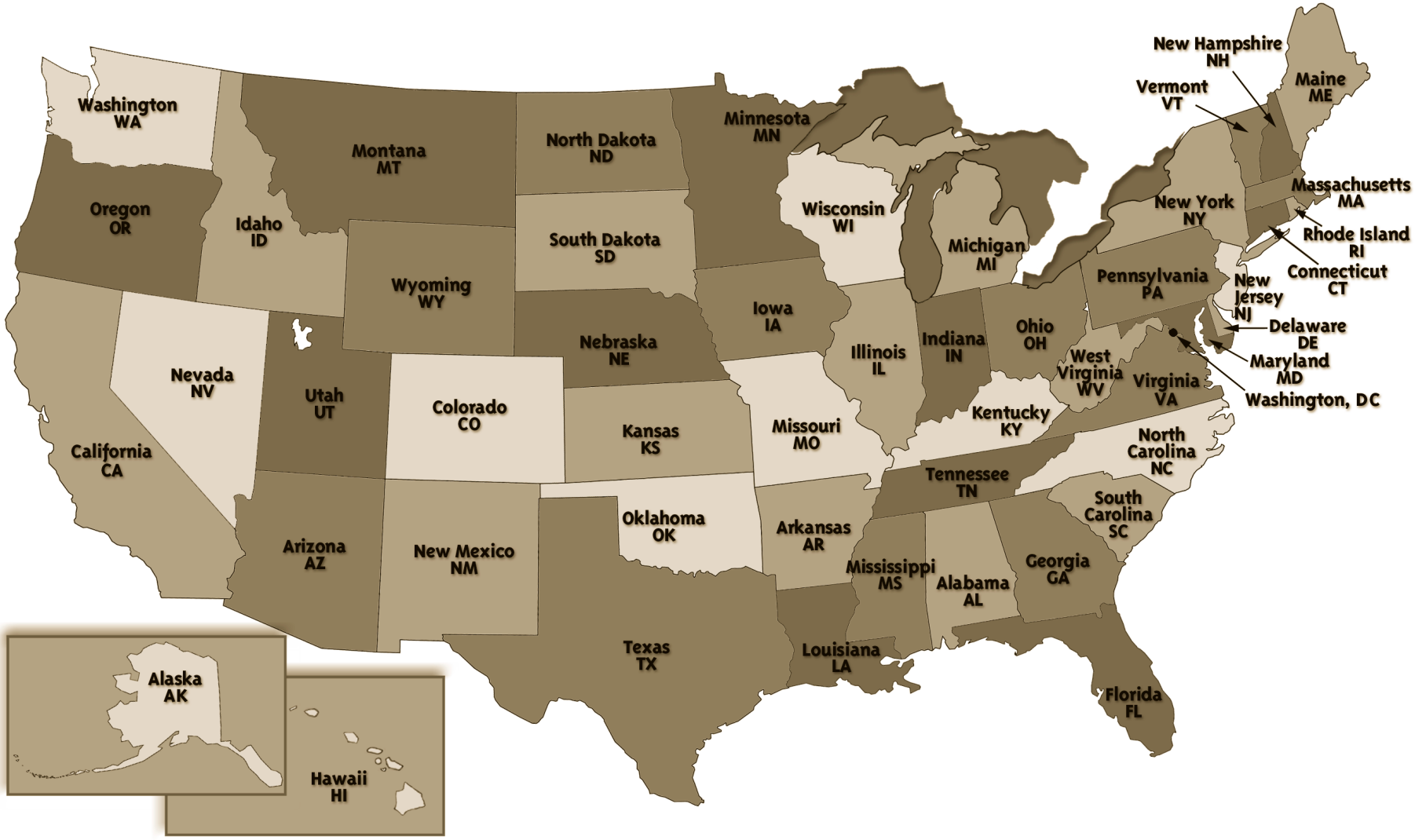
1 *Undergraduate Study* — how to choose and apply to U.S. bachelor's and associate degree programs, plus information on technical and vocational educational opportunities in the United States.

2 *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.

3 *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 towards 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.

4 *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 invaluable advice on applying for a visa, moving to the United States, and what to expect when you arrive on campus. It is available only on the U.S. Department of State's Web site at: http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

The United States of America



CONTENTS

Introduction
Why Study in the United States? 10
U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 1 **U.S. Undergraduate Education** 13
Colleges, Universities, and Institutes: The Distinction
Bachelor's and Associate Degrees
The Liberal Arts Philosophy
Professional Education
State Universities
Private Universities
Community Colleges
Technical and Vocational Colleges
Distance Education
Non-Degree Study at a U.S. College
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 2 **The U.S. Bachelor's Degree** 19
Academic Calendar
The Credit System
Degree Courses
Grades
What Is a GPA?
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 3 **Community Colleges** 24
Programs of Study
- Two-Year Associate Degree Programs
- Certificate Programs
- Continuing Education

Accreditation
Transfer and Articulation Agreements
Admission
Costs
Financial Aid
Student Life
The Classroom Experience
Useful Web Sites

CONTENTS

Chapter 4 **Choosing the Best Colleges for You** 32
Sources of Information to Help You Choose
- U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers
- College Web Sites and E-Mail
- College Searches on the Web
- U.S. College Fairs and Visits
- Visiting Campuses
- Educational Consultants and Recruiting Agents

Academic Considerations
- Accreditation and Recognition of Degrees
- Major
- Academic Emphasis
- Selectivity
- Degree Program Structure
- Advanced Standing
- Student-to-Teacher Ratio

Lifestyle Considerations
- Cost
- Housing
- Location
- Size

College Environment
- Social Life
- Fraternities and Sororities
- International Students
- Affiliations
- Extracurricular Activities

Other Considerations
- Beyond the Ivy League
- Rankings
- Student Services
- Internship or Overseas Study Programs
- Students With Disabilities

Useful Web Sites

Chapter 5 **Entrance Requirements** 48
Secondary School Diplomas/Examination Results
English Language Ability
- The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

Standardized Admissions Tests
The Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)
The American College Testing Assessment (ACT)
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 6 **Financing Your Education** 56
Planning Ahead
Calculating Your Expenses
Tuition and Fees
Living Costs
Financing Your Education
Assessing Personal Funds
Identifying Sources of Financial Assistance
Reducing Educational Costs
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 7 **Sports Scholarships** 67
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 8 **Preparing a Successful Application** 72
Requesting Application Materials
When to Send Your Inquiry
Where to Send Your Inquiry
What to Include
Registering for the Admissions Tests
Completing and Returning the Application Materials
Application Form
Application Fee
Academic Credentials
Test Score Reporting
Personal Statement
Recommendations
Financial Statement
Deadlines and Submission
Mid-Year Admissions
Interviews
Common Application Form
Acceptance
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 9 **The Application Process: A Timetable and Checklist** 86

Chapter 10 **Transferring to a U.S. University** 89
Credit Transfer
Transferring Between U.S. Institutions
Transferring From Outside the U.S. Education System
The Transfer Application Process
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 11 **Applying for a Student Visa** 98
Visa Types
Procedures for Your Country
Applying for a Student Visa: A Step-by-Step Guide
Visa Refusals
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 12 **American University Life** 104
Arrival in the United States
Orientation
International Student Adviser (ISA)
Academic Adviser (AA)
University Housing
Money and Banking
Health Insurance
Social Life
Useful Web Sites

Appendices **Glossary of Terms** 110

Bibliography 116

Index 119

More than 3,600 colleges and universities offer undergraduate degree programs in the United States. This vast number 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 500,000[1] 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 unrivalled worldwide in the choice it offers of types of institutions, academic and social environments, entry requirements, degree programs, and subjects in which you can specialize. Chapters 4 and 5 explain the entry requirements and guide you through the process of choosing the right colleges for you.

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, have made study in the United States affordable for thousands of students before you. Chapters 6 and 7 offer information and advice on the costs and financing of your U.S. education.

Flexibility: One of the most distinctive features of U.S. universities and colleges is the flexibility in choice of courses within a college or university, but more importantly there is also the option for students to move between one institution and 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.

Within this booklet you will also find help with preparing successful college applications (chapters 8 and 9)and with the visa application process (chapter 11). Once you have an offer of admission, you will want to check out the tips on what to expect when you arrive in the United States (chapter 12). At the end of the booklet, a glossary explains some of the words and phrases you will come across frequently when applying to study in the United States.

U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers

> **"It is difficult to overestimate the help and support I got from the advising center. The center was my first and primary source of information about the American educational system. The books, magazines, and the Internet access at the center proved extremely useful, and the staff assisted me very much in achieving my goals."**
>
> *— Business student from Russia*

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

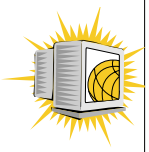
"The educational advisers at the center helped me clarify many matters regarding studying in the United States and were always ready to lend a hand. I also learned a lot about the colleges and universities of my choice through the excellent resources available."

— Psychology student from Malaysia

United States is available to you from a network of over 450 U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide. Directories, guides, college catalogs, and admissions test information are all available at the centers, as well as trained educational advisers who want to help you and your family with the process of choosing and applying to U.S. colleges. Some centers also run events such as college fairs or seminars. Introductory information in the form of video or group presentations, Web site access, and independent resource libraries is available free of charge from information and advising centers, but payment may be required at some centers for additional services.

All U.S. educational information and advising centers are supported by the U.S. State Department, 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 U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

Good luck with your applications!

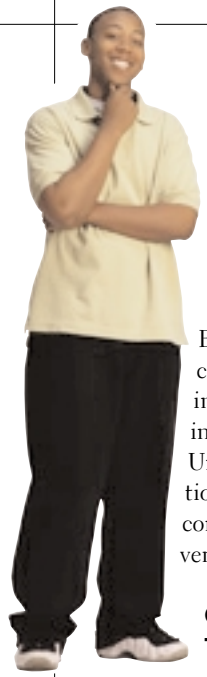


Useful Web Sites

On-line Version of the *If You Want to Study in the United States* Booklet Series
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

Directory of U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers Worldwide
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

[1] *Open Doors 2000: Open Doors on the Web*, http://www.opendoorsweb.org/. Institute of International Education, New York, N.Y.



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 a university also offers 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 also come across degree programs offered at institutes of technology, institutes of fashion, institutes of art and design, and so on.

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, though some students take slightly less time to finish, while others may take longer. The associate degree usually takes two years to complete. Associate degree programs may be "terminal" programs, which lead into specific careers upon graduation, or "transfer" programs, which correspond to the first two years of a bachelor's degree and tend to be more liberal arts based. Under the latter option you could then 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

Liberal arts is a shortened form of the term "liberal arts and sciences," and the liberal arts philosophy is a unique feature of the U.S. higher education system. U.S. undergraduate education is based on this concept, which believes in providing a well-rounded academic education that develops the student's 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 is required to take some classes in mathematics and, possibly, the sciences.

Professional Education

Professional (that is, 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 — usually business, agriculture, medicine, law, and journalism. Institutes of technology have a scientific emphasis in all the degrees they offer. 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 that state. 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 such as "eastern" or "northern." 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 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.

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 uni-

versities 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 (A.A.) or associate of science (A.S.) 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. 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. A growing number of international students are choosing to study at community colleges, and this is discussed in further detail later in this booklet. Tuition costs are often lower at two-year than at four-year institutions, and many 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 world of work. 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 less. There are several thousand technical and vocational colleges across the United States, and they may be private or public institutions. Further information on short-term study opportunities in the United States is provided in Booklet Three in this series, *Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation*.

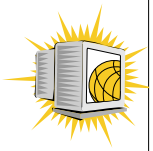
Distance Education

Distance education is an increasingly popular way to study for everything from a short professional course to a graduate degree in the United States, and there are numerous institutions offering undergraduate degree programs using distance education teaching methods. Under the distance education model, students no longer attend classes in a classroom on a 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 that they can study for a U.S. degree without leaving their home country, though they will almost certainly 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 have special qualities such as self-discipline and the ability 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 make sure this option is the appropriate one for your future goals. Further information on distance education is provided in the third booklet of this series.

Non-Degree Study at a U.S. College

Do you want to study in the United States at a 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 students such as you. You should write

to colleges, explain your situation, and request information on applying for "special student" or "non-degree student" status. See Booklet Three in 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.



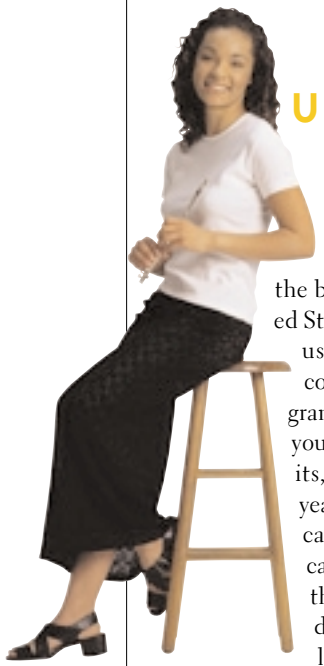
Useful Web Sites

Overviews of the U.S. Education System
http://www.ed.gov/NLE/USNEI/toc.html
http://www.edupass.org

Distance Education Information
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

Information on Non-Degree Study in the United States
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

For community college and university Web sites, see chapters 3 and 4 in this booklet.



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 the degree. Or it may 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. Courses taken in the first two years are known as lower division courses, and courses taken in the final two years are called upper division courses. College catalogs usually assign a number to a course, which indicates the level of study as follows:

100 – 199	Freshman
200 – 299	Sophomore
300 – 399	Junior
400 – 499	Senior

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 18 weeks called "semesters." Alternatively, the university may have "quarters" or "trimesters," which are about 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 over Christmastime and a one-week "spring break" sometime between early March and mid-April.

The Credit System

Students at American universities complete their degrees when they have accumulated a certain number of "credits." It usually takes somewhere between 130 and 180 credits to graduate. Sometimes the terms "semester/quarter hours" or "units" are used instead of credits. Each individual course you take each semester earns a specified number (usually three or four) of credits/hours/units. 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 major in one subject; however, some colleges offer the option of pursuing a double major with a related subject. 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 you may be interested in and help make up the total number of credits required to graduate.

Grades

American 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 the reading and course work and to attend classes on a regular basis.

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

100 – 90% = A
89 – 80% = B
79 – 70% = C
69 – 60% = D
59 – 50% = E
49 – 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, but a few universities use a scale of 5.0. 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 will also offer some sort of honors degree. To qualify for an honors degree, you must fulfill additional credits or write an honors thesis; precise details depend upon the university and/or academic department. There may be different levels of honors: summa cum laude, magna cum laude, and cum laude, in descending order of distinction.

Time for a Recap

✏ American 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 on his or her degree program.

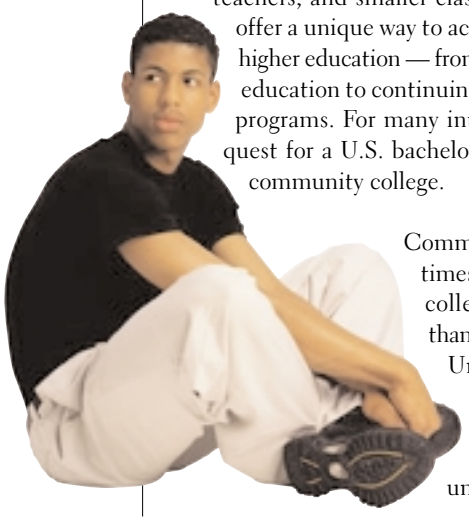
Useful Web Sites

Undergraduate Degree Study in the United States
http://www.embark.com/nafsa/academic.asp

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Increasingly, international students are looking at community colleges as their gateway to academic advancement. Like their American classmates, they are discovering that many of these unique schools have outstanding programs, transferable credits, reasonable fees, and supportive environments. These factors are so attractive that over 40 percent of the U.S. undergraduate population can be found in the classrooms of America's two-year colleges.

The number of international students at community colleges has been rising rapidly in recent years. With high-quality courses, simplified application procedures, low costs, extensive student support systems, committed teachers, and smaller classes, community colleges offer a unique way to access many aspects of U.S. higher education — from technical and vocational education to continuing education to full degree programs. For many international students, the quest for a U.S. bachelor's degree will begin at a community college.



Community colleges are sometimes called junior or two-year colleges, and there are more than 1,200 such colleges in the United States. Most community colleges are public or state-supported. A few are independent or under private control.

Like other post-secondary institutions in the United States, two-year colleges are varied. There are large multi-campus suburban systems with over 50,000 students and hundreds of programs and facilities. There are also small, rural schools with fewer than 1,000 students and a limited number of majors. Even the students are diverse, coming from all age groups, cultures, and economic backgrounds.

Programs of Study

In addition to academic programs leading to college degrees, community colleges offer vocational education and technical training. Community colleges usually have strong ties with their state's universities and their region's business sector, and so are sometimes referred to as the community's college. These relationships mean that the college curricula are designed to prepare students for either future academic success or immediate employment.

Programs of study at community colleges usually include:

Two-Year Associate Degree Programs

These may be:

— designed to fulfill the requirements for the first two years of a four-year bachelor's degree. They may be called transfer degree programs because students who complete them later transfer to four-year universities for the final two years of study. Examples of such programs include pre-business administration, pre-engineering, fine arts, liberal arts, and computer science.

— designed to prepare students for immediate employment in fields such as automotive engineering, interior design, aviation flight technology, child development, criminal justice, health care services and sciences, business, fire science technology, paralegal studies, food management, and photography. These are sometimes called terminal degree programs.

Certificate Programs

Certificate programs train individuals for positions in areas like social work and human services, health care, building trades, and technologies. Certificate programs may be short- or long-term depending on the type of course that is offered. Long-term programs include nursing, while short-term certificate programs include such specialty areas as office technology, real estate, and computer-assisted design.

Continuing Education

Continuing education programs are for students who wish to enhance their professional or personal skills, rather than to study for credit toward a degree or certificate. There is an endless variety of courses offered for students in this area.

The certificate programs at two-year colleges are very similar to those found at vocational and technical institutions. Additional information about vocational and technical training, as well as continuing education courses, may be found in the third booklet of this series, which focuses on short-term study opportunities in the United States.

Accreditation

Institutional accreditation of a community college is very important, especially if you hope to transfer from a two-year college to a four-year institution, in which case you will want to ensure recognition of your first two years of study. Nearly all the community colleges and private two-year institutions in the United States are accredited by the same agencies that assess the four-year colleges and universities in their geographical area. However, prospective students should always verify the accreditation of any two-year college in which they are interested.

Transfer and Articulation Agreements

In addition to accreditation, the smooth transition from a community college to a four-year institution depends on the strength of the articulation agreement between the two schools. These contracts specify which courses transfer automatically from one institution to the other and, therefore, can be counted toward the four-year degree.

Public community colleges work closely with the public universities in their state to develop transfer guidelines. The transfer of credits involving a private or an out-of-state institution may not be as well-defined.

If your ultimate goal is to earn a bachelor's degree, then as early as possible you should:

- ✏ declare your intent to pursue a transfer associate degree;
- ✏ confer with the academic/transfer counselor at the community college to identify a major;
- ✏ select a four-year institution and seek out the latest information on its transfer policy and its programs of study.

One reason for planning carefully is that schools do not have the same course requirements for identical degrees. By targeting the four-year institution early and determining what is needed to transfer, then following a carefully designed program, you can avoid unnecessary work and expense.

Also, because of accreditation or university requirements, some four-year institutions cannot accept certain courses from other schools. Before taking a lot of courses in one field of study, especially business or engineering, students should talk to their academic/transfer counselor, who will be familiar with any restrictions.

Recent innovative arrangements have made transferring easier. Some institutions have worked together to estab-

lish "dual admissions" policies whereby students are admitted to both the two-year and the four-year schools at the same time. Immediately after completing an associate degree, the student may transfer directly into the bachelor's program at the cooperating university.

Admission

Community colleges operate an "open-door" admissions policy. This means anyone who wishes to enroll and meets the minimum entry requirements can do so.

Each institution will have its own set of admission requirements, but the minimum usually includes the following:

- completed application form;
- proof of secondary school completion (usually 12 years of schooling);
- certification of English language proficiency (usually a score from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL));
- evidence of financial support (required for the I-20 form — see chapter 11, "Applying for a Student Visa").

The TOEFL requirement is often lower for a community college than it is for a four-year institution. In addition, if your TOEFL score is a little below the entry requirement, the community college may still admit you into the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. Successful completion of all the prescribed ESL courses will open the door to the wider academic world of the community college.

As with four-year colleges, students should contact the admissions office of the two-year college to request international admissions information. Many community colleges now have Web sites with downloadable or on-line applications.

Costs

For many international students, a major attraction of community colleges is their low cost.

Tuition and fees at colleges do vary based on the program of study and whether the college is public or private. Nevertheless, the cost of attending a two-year institution is usually lower than that of a four-year college in the same geographic area. This is the case even for international students attending public community colleges where all out-of-state students must pay a higher rate than state residents. The economic advantage of two-year colleges is difficult to ignore.

Financial Aid

In general, it will be a challenge for international students to secure financial aid at state-supported community colleges. Though you should check with the colleges about any scholarships they offer that are open to international students, almost all of the funds available to students will come from the federal government or local government, and are set aside specifically for U.S. citizens and permanent residents. There is a slightly better chance of acquiring financial assistance at private colleges. Other private institutions such as foundations, corporations, or associations may also have funds for grants and scholarships.

Student Life

The services and personnel at a community college play important roles in creating a supportive learning environment. Academic assistance comes in the form of ESL programs; developmental courses in mathematics, reading, and writing; tutorial services; and academic advising. Student services include personal and career counselors, facilities for students with disabilities, and extracurricu-

lar activities. Cooperative education offices reach out to businesses in the community to locate training opportunities or internships for their students.

Importantly, institutions that have a history of educating international students will have special foreign student advisers. This may make a considerable difference to your experience at the college as such staff will have more experience dealing with the unique visa, academic, cultural, and personal issues faced by international students studying in the United States.

Most two-year colleges do not offer student housing but often provide assistance through local housing groups. Students usually commute to campus and live in local communities. This experience is very different from living in student dormitories on a four-year college campus, and it gives international students a wonderful opportunity to develop independence and observe American life.

The Classroom Experience

Above all else, the success of community colleges rests in their classrooms. Their faculty members are renowned for being expert teachers who prefer interacting with students to conducting research or publishing articles. Also, the class sizes are often smaller, which means instructors can give each student personal attention.

Time for a Recap

Community colleges:

- ✏ are an important part of the U.S. higher education system.
- ✏ offer high quality programs that prepare students for immediate employment.
- ✏ offer transfer associate degree programs that can lead to a bachelor's degree.

- ✏ are highly cost effective.
- ✏ provide a nurturing learning environment with committed instructors, smaller classes, and extensive support systems.

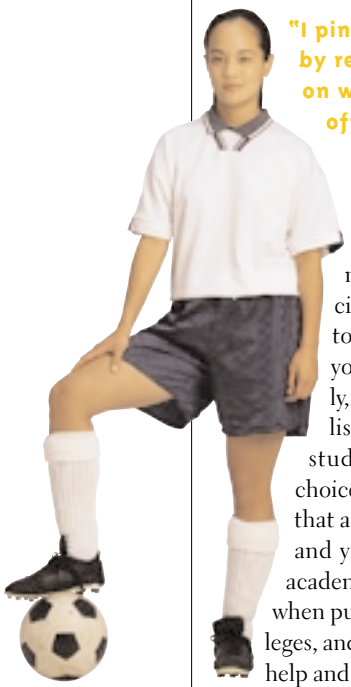
USEFUL WEB SITES

Community College Information and Links — Listed by State
http://www.aacc.nche.edu

Links to Community Colleges — Listed by Name
http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/cc/

U.S. News & World Report — Community College Search Site
http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/communit/commsrch.htm

CHOOSING THE BEST COLLEGES FOR YOU



"I pinpointed the colleges of my choice by reflecting upon my own needs and on what the respective schools could offer."

— Psychology student from Malaysia

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 shortlist 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 in both your education and your lifestyle. This chapter discusses what academic, lifestyle, and other factors to consider when putting together a list of around 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

U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers

U.S. educational information and advising centers can be found 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 such as this one, handouts, and reference books to assist you in applying to study in the United States. Many centers have developed guides, videos, and Web sites specifically tailored to students applying from your country. Many also have computer-based college search packages to help you choose the best colleges for you. Most important of all, they have trained staff who can answer your questions in person or by mail, by telephone, and, in most cases, by e-mail.

College Web Sites and E-Mail

"E-mail students of your nationality who are at a particular school and find out about their experiences."

— Computer science student from Ghana

The United States leads the world in using the World Wide Web. Almost every U.S. university and college has a Web site that offers a wealth of 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, which you can study on-line or download to read later. Don't forget that many sites also give e-mail addresses for current students, including international students, who are often more than happy to answer your questions about applying to the school and about life on campus. Once you have narrowed down the colleges and universities you are interested in, you may wish to e-mail professors and admissions personnel to have specific questions answered before you finally decide where to apply.

College Searches on the Web

Some Web sites are independent of colleges and universities and allow you to search for institutions by the sub-

ject you are interested in studying, by geographic preference, or by a range of other criteria that you specify.

U.S. College Fairs and Visits

If you cannot visit the United States, colleges may come to visit you. Your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center can tell you about any upcoming U.S. college fairs or other types of visits where you can have the opportunity to talk to 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.

Visiting Campuses

"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 that are 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. Americans are famous for being friendly, so talk to the 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 your information or advising center if they have further information about such organizations.

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 for assisting you with the process of choosing U.S. colleges and putting together your 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, and so it is important to check the credentials and past performance of educational consultants or agents before using their services.

If you have found a recruiting agent or a consultant who is helpful, well informed, and dependable, she or he may be very useful in helping you to 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 stories with students from your country. Ask for a list of names and addresses of students presently studying in the United States who are there because of the agent's or consultant's help. 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 is asking for expensive fees for his or her services. Lastly, always check with an unbiased source (such as a U.S. educational information or 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, it must be noted that 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 well in advance 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. 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.

U.S. educational information and 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 in this series and on the Web sites listed at the end of this chapter.

Major

> **"Get to know the colleges you are really interested in. Some of the so-called big names have very strong departments — but also some weak ones too."**
>
> *— Politics and fine arts student from Finland*

Your major is the field of study in which you plan to specialize. It is not essential to declare the major you plan to undertake 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 to choose from. 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 Web or at U.S. educational information and advising centers can also help you narrow down your choices. Make use of college catalogs and bulletins to check if your interests are offered 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. However, at some of these campuses, first- and second-year classes may be taught by graduate students instead of professors.

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 Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) score and grade point average (GPA) for the previous year's accepted students. Selectivity assessments using this type of data, however, tend to put weight on admissions test scores, which are only one part of an application. Remember 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 your 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 they must take them 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 each of the broad subject groups, while other liberal arts colleges have no such requirements, merely making "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 post-secondary 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 the 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 the class 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

> **"As a foreign student, I had to consider not only the academic aspects of the school, but also things we might take for granted such as the school's location, climate, and so on."**
>
> — *International studies and sociology student from Ghana*

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. You should know what you can realistically afford. Carefully study the fee structure printed in most university catalogs, and incorporate into your calculations the cost of room, food, tuition, fees, travel, and other expenses for the full four years. You also need to consider that tuition costs may rise, as many universities increase their tuition every year. Also look at 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. Yet living on campus, at least for the first year or two, may help you integrate into American 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, and also 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 can 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 personal 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 a small college may be able to offer you. You should not make assumptions regarding social life or access to professors based on the size of an institution. Determine what opportunities are important to you and read the catalogs closely with these in mind.

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 will determine the social environment you will find on your campus. You should also consider whether the majority of the students live on or off a university campus. 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

A unique feature of U.S. campus life is the Greek system, which offers students the choice of joining a fraternity or sorority. (The term "Greek" is used because the names of fraternities and sororities are composed of two or three Greek letters.) Fraternities (male) and sororities (female) can be the focus of undergraduate social life on many U.S. campuses. However, as well as holding parties, fra-

ternities and sororities often sponsor philanthropic activities. Students with a strong preference for or against the Greek system need to find out whether the fraternities and sororities dominate the social life of a campus. If you do not wish to be part of Greek life, attending a university where the Greek scene is prevalent can be problematic, because the pressure to join may be high and the social life options outside of the system may be limited.

International Students

The number of international students enrolled at a U.S. college ranges from less than 10 to over 3,000, and of course most fall somewhere in between. College directories often list exactly how many international students are enrolled alongside other data on each institution. U.S. educational information and 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 who can share your experiences, but it may require extra effort on your part to make sure you meet and interact with U.S. students as well as with students from other parts of the world.

Affiliations

All U.S. colleges will accept students of any race, color, or creed. Many universities or colleges, however, were founded with a certain mission, whether to provide a religious atmosphere on campus or a single-sex educational experience or a majority ethnic student population. Read the school's mission statement printed in its cata-

log carefully and decide if your goals match the goals of the campus. Out of the 3,600 U.S. colleges and universities, there are about 600 to 700 affiliated with a specific church denomination or religious tradition. In addition to these, there are approximately 70 bible colleges, which are committed to helping students integrate faith and learning and preparing them to live out their faith in all areas of life. Based on current listings, 13 colleges are for men only, and there are around 65 women-only colleges. There are also some colleges that cater to African-American or Hispanic students.

Extracurricular Activities

U.S. universities offer many opportunities for students to develop skills through extracurricular activities such as sports teams, academic clubs, university newspapers, drama productions, and other rewarding programs. If you have a definite interest, make sure there is a student society that caters to it — don't forget, though, that if there isn't, you can always start one. Also, looking through the various student organizations will give you an idea of the interests and concerns of the student body, and thus give another insight into student life at various colleges.

Other Considerations

Beyond the Ivy League

Although the Ivy League was originally a sports league for several East Coast colleges, the term has become associated with an exclusive, elite education. However, there are hundreds of good schools in the United States. Do not dismiss a university or college just because you or your family have not heard of it before; you should consider your own needs first. Don't confine yourself to "Ivies." Investigate all options carefully to make sure you give yourself the best chances to find institutions that suit your 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. Rankings that you come across are usually produced by journalists and are likely to be subjective. They are generally based on a wide range of criteria that do not necessarily include academic standards or general reputation as a primary factor. Be particularly wary of rankings that do not explain the criteria on which the ranking is based. The more established rankings may give you a starting point for your decision; however, the "best" college is the one that is right for you based on factors such as those suggested in this chapter.

Student Services

U.S. universities offer students a variety of services such as international student advisers, 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, career counseling, and more. Prospective undergraduates can compare facilities among universities to find services tailored to their specific needs.

Internship or Overseas Study Programs

Many U.S. universities have incorporated into their curriculum internship (voluntary or paid work placements) or overseas study ("study abroad") programs 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. It is advisable to 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 they offer to students like yourself. 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 services they provide. 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. A campus visit is recommended. If possible, try to contact a student at the college who has a similar disability to yours so you can gain a more personal perspective. 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.

Time for a Recap

✏ 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 U.S. educational information and advising centers.

✏ Find out about any 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 Web Sites

Directory of U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers Worldwide
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

Links to College Homepages
http://www.mit.edu:8001/people/cdemello/univ.html
http://www.siu.no/inst.nsf/searchform2

College Search Sites
Many of these sites also include general information on choosing schools:
http://www.collegeboard.org
http://www.collegenet.com
http://www.collegeview.com
http://www.educationconnect.com
http://www.embark.com
http://www.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cool
http://www.petersons.com
http://www.review.com

Accreditation Information
http://www.chea.org

Rankings of Schools
http://www.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankings.htm

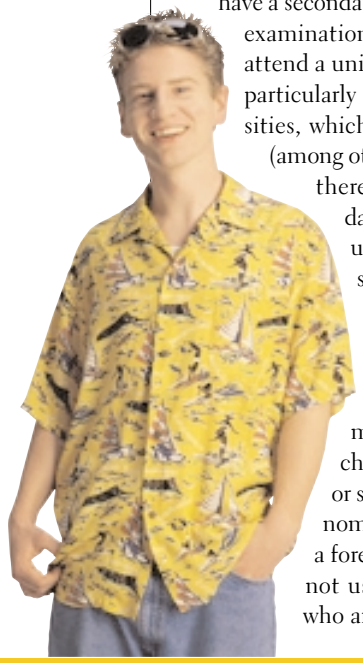
Information for Students With Disabilities
http://www.miusa.org

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, English language ability, and in many cases a score from one of the U.S. university admissions tests (see below). 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 universities, which look for students with high grades (among other things). However, remember that there is 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. Lastly, universities will not usually accept international students who are younger than age 17.



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. Almost all institutions require that this test be the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). A few may accept scores from other examinations or administer their own tests. For further information, check each college's catalog or contact the admissions office to discuss your situation. As with many areas of U.S. education, each institution sets its own English language admission standard, but some general guidelines on requirements are given in the section on TOEFL scores below. Some institutions may grant conditional acceptance with the understanding that you must 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.

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

TOEFL is currently given in most countries around the world on computer, and the paper-based version is being phased out. The test is offered on many days in the month, but only at a limited number of computer-based testing centers. You may have to travel some distance to reach the nearest test center.

Test Registration: Pre-registration is required, and it is NOT possible to go to the testing center and hope to find space available that same day. Computer-based testing registration deadlines vary. According to TOEFL

instructions, mail-in registration deadlines are three weeks ahead of your desired test date, one week ahead of the test date for fax registrations, and two days ahead of the test date for registration by telephone. Note that a credit card is required to register by fax or telephone. You can indicate the days when you would prefer to take the test, and the test administrators will try to accommodate your request. However, at certain times of the year, or in certain cities, centers may be very busy. It is therefore advisable to register at least two to three months in advance of your desired test date. For those countries where paper-based testing is still offered, the test is given on certain dates during the year, and registration deadlines are approximately six weeks ahead of those dates.

TOEFL registration bulletins are available from either the test administrators in the United States, the regional registration center for your country (see the TOEFL Web site at http://www.toefl.org or the test registration bulletin for further details), or from a U.S. educational information or advising center. These centers may ask you to pay postage costs, and they may also have test preparation materials for the TOEFL available for reference use, loan, or purchase.

TOEFL Waivers: 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, your TOEFL requirement may be waived. Allow sufficient time in the application process to correspond with the U.S. university about this issue. American universities will probably not accept secondary school English language examination results as proof of your language ability.

Content: The test uses a multiple choice and essay format to measure each examinee's ability to understand North American English. The test is divided into four sections: listening, structure, reading, and writing. The writing section requires the test taker to write an essay.

TOEFL is a computer-adaptive test, which means that not all students answer exactly the same questions on the test. Instead, depending on how the student performs on each question, the computer determines whether the level of the next question should be harder or easier.

Scores: The total number of questions you answer correctly and your score on the essay form the raw scores for each section. Raw scores are then converted to a scaled score for each section, which for the computer-based test ranges from 0 to 30. From these a total score is calculated, which ranges between 40 and 300 for the computer-based test. Each college decides for itself what score is acceptable. In general, colleges consider a total score of 250 or above to be excellent and a score below 97 as inadequate. Average scores range between 173 and 250 for undergraduate applicants.

Standardized Admissions Tests

As a part of the application process, most American 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 *International Student Handbook of U.S. Colleges* (The College Board, New York, N.Y.) and *Applying to Colleges and Universities in the United States: A Handbook for International Students* (Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.). Also note that community colleges do not usually require applicants to take standardized admissions tests.

U.S. standardized admissions tests are primarily multiple-choice aptitude tests that are intended to measure the skills necessary for undergraduate study. American col-

leges and universities use admissions tests as a means of assessing all applicants (from the United States and other countries) against the same standard. Keep in mind that secondary school diplomas and examinations are not an 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.

There are three main undergraduate admissions tests:
✏ Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT I)
✏ SAT II Subject Tests
✏ American College Testing (ACT) Assessment

Some universities may have their own in-house examinations or additional tests that applicants are required to take. For further information, make a list of the colleges you want to apply to, and then use general college directories or the colleges' own catalogs and Web sites to find out each institution's specific test requirements.

The Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)

Both the SAT I and SAT II are given several times throughout the year at locations worldwide. Pre-registration is required, and deadlines are usually six weeks prior to the exam. More specific information about dates, test centers, fees, and registration procedures is available in the SAT registration bulletin or on the SAT test administrators' Web site at http://www.collegeboard.org. You can get copies of the registration bulletin from the College Board in the United States or from your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center. You may be asked to pay postage costs for these bulletins. U.S. centers also usually have sample questions and other test preparation materials for the SAT tests available for reference use, loan, or purchase.

Content: The SAT I is primarily a multiple-choice test that measures verbal and mathematical reasoning abili-

ties. The test is divided into seven half-hour sections: three verbal; three mathematical; and one additional section, the equating section, which is either verbal 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 SAT II 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:

✏ American History and Social Studies
✏ Biology
✏ Chemistry
✏ Chinese
✏ English Language Proficiency
✏ French
✏ German
✏ Italian
✏ Japanese
✏ Korean
✏ Latin
✏ Literature
✏ Mathematics
✏ Modern Hebrew
✏ Physics
✏ Spanish
✏ World History
✏ Writing

Many U.S. colleges and universities, especially those that have more competitive admissions criteria, either require or recommend one or more SAT II test scores for admission and/or placement purposes. Be sure to check each institution's requirements before registering for any SAT II test. While some colleges specify which subject tests you must take, others leave the option up to you. In this case, it is advisable to take exams in your strongest areas of study.

Scores: The mathematical and verbal sections of the SAT I are each scored on a 200 to 800 scale. Therefore, the highest possible combined score on the SAT I would be 1,600. Scores are reported separately to colleges for the mathematical and verbal sections. Most college directories and catalogs quote average scaled scores for each institution to give some guidance on relative selectivity. The SAT II Subject Tests are also scored on a 200 to 800 scale.

The American College Testing Assessment (ACT)

The ACT is administered by the American College Testing Program and is given up to five times annually at testing locations around the world. Unlike the SAT, the number of times the test is offered varies from one test center to another. As an international student, you may not need to take the ACT. If it is required, however, plan ahead to make sure you do not miss the test date(s) at your nearest center. Pre-registration is required, and deadlines are two to three weeks prior to the exam. Since the ACT is not as widely accepted as the SAT, check to see if the universities where you are applying will accept ACT scores in place of the SAT exam. More specific information about dates and test centers is available in the registration bulletin, which can be obtained from the test administrators and from many U.S. information and advising centers. Note that the centers may ask you to pay postage costs.

Content: The ACT Assessment is a multiple-choice test that measures English, mathematics, reading, and sciences reasoning.

Scores: For each of the four subject areas, you receive a raw score, which is the total number of correct responses. 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 several weeks to reach universities.

Time for a Recap

✏ 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 Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT I) or the American College Testing (ACT) Assessment. Some may also require SAT II Subject Tests. Check ahead to determine specific test requirements.

✏ The SAT tests are held several times per academic year, and registration materials are available from the test administrators or from U.S. educational information and advising centers. You can also register on the World Wide Web.

✏ If English is not your first language, you also need to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). In certain cases, another English language proficiency test may be acceptable.

Useful Web Sites

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

Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)
http://www.collegeboard.org

American College Testing (ACT) Assessment
http://www.act.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

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 yourself 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, while fees are charged for services such as the library, student activities, or the health center. International students are required to pay both tuition and fees. Some universities may also charge international students an additional mandatory health insurance fee.

Although the range of tuition and fees may vary greatly from school to school, there is no correlation between the level of tuition and fees and the quality of an institution. The amount charged by a particular college depends on many factors, the most significant of which is what type of school it is. 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. It should be remembered, too, that 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.

Since tuition and fees vary from school to school and rise by an average of 5 percent each year, it is best to consult current college catalogs, Web sites, or reference materials available at U.S. educational information and 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. If you are bringing family members with you to the United States, this will, of course, increase your monthly expenses.

Living expenses are highest in the large cities, in California, and in the Northeast. Costs can be much lower in the South, the Midwest, and other areas. University catalogs and Web sites 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 U.S. educational information or advising center may also have information on the latest monthly living expenses by city or institution.

Your basic living expenses will include food and housing, of course, but don't forget to allow for the following:

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 book costs can be quite expensive. Most institutions have on-campus bookstores. Many of these stores allow you to purchase used books at a lesser 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 com-

muting 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 dependants — 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;
- 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, spe-

cial 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.

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

Funding From Colleges: Meet with an educational 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.

You will discover that financial aid is very rare at state, or public, colleges and at colleges that offer professional courses such as engineering, business administration, and health professions. More financial aid may be available from the private liberal arts colleges, which offer the arts and science subjects.

As you do your research, make a table listing the colleges you would like to attend. Write down annual costs (as

outlined above), 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 information or advising center. This chart can quickly allow you to see where your best chances lie, and can help you eliminate from your list the colleges where your admission with the needed funding is not viable.

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 1,000, 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 SAT and TOEFL 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 what you and your family can afford to contribute and the estimated cost of attending the college. The former 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 the 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. Again, your educational 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 educational 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 any 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 graduate or other further study and for returning home.

Employment: Current immigration regulations permit international students to work only part-time — up to 20 hours per week — and only on campus during their first year of study. 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 within 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 Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) for permission to work off campus for up to 20 hours a week. You should note, however, that there is no guarantee that this request 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. However, 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 is available in chapter 12 of this booklet and in our virtual booklet entitled *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information For Living and Studying in the United States* located at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

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 programs by:

- ✏ earning transfer credit or advanced standing for college-level studies completed in the home country (for example through A-levels, International Baccalaureate, advanced placement exams, or courses taken at local accredited post-secondary institutions in your country, 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;
- ✏ taking one additional course each semester.

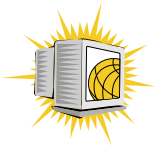
Tuition Waivers: Based on your first-year grades, some colleges award partial tuition waivers. A superior academic record could save you thousands of dollars.

Living Expenses: Becoming a resident assistant in a dormitory could save thousands of dollars in living costs. Working in the dining hall offers a modest salary plus "all you can eat" meals. 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.

Time for a Recap

- ✏ 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. You must 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 should 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 Web Sites

General Information on Financial Aid for International Students
http://www.edupass.org/finaid
http://www.nafsa.org/students/funding.html
http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/oseas/aid.html

Schools With Financial Aid for International Students
http://www.edupass.org/finaid/undergraduate.phtml

Scholarship Search Site — Some Awards for International Students
http://www.fastweb.com

Loan Information for International Students
http://www.edupass.org/finaid/loans.phtml

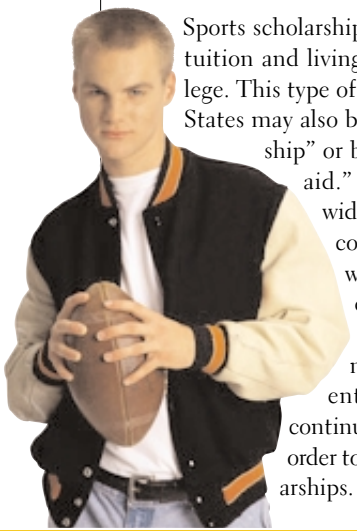
Tax Information for International Students
http://www.edupass.org/finaid/taxes.phtml
http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/

SPORTS SCHOLARSHIPS

"There is no better way to earn a degree in whatever field you please, than by doing what you love most — in my case it is running and jumping over hurdles."

— Track athlete from South Africa, studying at a community college

Are you a talented athlete who would like to study for a degree in the United States? Are you currently competing in a sport at a high level of excellence? Then you might be a perfect candidate for a sports scholarship.



Sports scholarships cover all or part of the cost of tuition and living costs for attending a U.S. college. This type of funding for study in the United States may also be known as an "athletic scholarship" or by its official title as a "grant-in-aid." Scholarships are available in a wide range of sports, though not all colleges offer every sport. Students with sports scholarships may take degrees in any field offered by the university; however, they must meet the normal university entrance requirements and then continue to obtain satisfactory grades in order to receive and maintain their scholarships. Various sporting authorities have

also set their own academic requirements for competing students.

Sports scholarships are normally awarded on an invitational basis by coaches who tour the United States searching for new talent. Occasionally coaches visit other countries, see non-U.S. students at international events, or find out about potential students through the professional sports associations outside the United States. However, this is unusual, and you will probably have to do most of the work in obtaining a scholarship yourself. The following is a step-by-step guide to help you find the appropriate school to pursue your dreams of athletic greatness. Alternatively, some students prefer to pay a fee to a placement service that can assist them with their efforts to obtain a sports scholarship; ask at your U.S. educational information or advising center for details of any placement services available in your country.

✏ Start your research approximately 18 to 24 months prior to your anticipated date of attendance at a university in the United States. Using a database such as "Peterson's Career and College Quest" or the Peterson's publication *Sports Scholarships and College Athletic Programs* (available at most information and advising centers), determine which universities offer the sport you play on a scholarship basis. From that list, determine which schools offer the major that you wish to study. Narrow the list down to approximately 70 schools. Seventy schools may sound like a lot, but the typical response rate is only around 5 percent. If level of competitiveness is important to you, you might want to consider applying only to what are known as "NCAA Division I" schools. To find out more about the three governing bodies for college sports in the United States — the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) — investigate

the Web sites listed at the end of this chapter or contact your nearest information or advising center.

✏ Use the Internet to research the schools on your list, and find the name of the head coach for whatever sport you play. Look for an e-mail address, too, but if one is not available, then a mailing address or fax number is sufficient. Most colleges have a section on their Web sites for "Athletics" or "Sports"; in the United States, "athletics" refers to all sports, not just track and field events.

✏ Prepare a letter of introduction. It should include your name, address, age, current year in school, contact information including e-mail and fax if available, physical statistics such as height and weight, your interest in attending the school on a sports scholarship, and when you would be available to start your studies. Also compile a short (one- or two-page) history of your achievements in your sport, including any awards and dates. Avoid the temptation to run on for several pages; coaches receive so much material from students that a short resume is preferred. If you play a non-measurable team sport such as soccer or basketball, you might want to consider having a video made of your abilities and talent. Make sure that it is in the U.S. NTSC video format. Tell the coach that you have the video available.

✏ Send the information to all of the coaches via the e-mail addresses you collected from the college Web sites. If you are unable to find an e-mail address, then send it via fax or the mail. Make sure it is addressed for the attention of the head coach, including his or her name if possible.

Coaches should contact you within a month or so. If you have heard nothing by that time, write a short note reminding them that you sent your information and are still interested.

Prepare a list of questions and keep it handy in case a coach telephones you for further information.

If an NCAA school is interested in recruiting you, investigate the procedure for obtaining clearance from the NCAA. More information can be found on the NCAA Web site (see page71). When taking your SAT test(s), be sure to report your scores to the NCAA (code 9999 on the registration form) if there is even a small chance that you would be attending an NCAA school. You cannot receive clearance without sending in your SAT scores.

If e-mail is available in your country but you do not have access to a computer or an e-mail account, try to get a free e-mail account from a service such as Hotmail or Yahoo and use the services of an Internet cafe. E-mail is a very important tool when applying for a sports scholarship, and it will be to your benefit to have access to it.

One word of caution: if you are admitted to an NCAA institution, DO NOT go to the United States until you have received clearance from the NCAA. If you do go to the United States without the proper clearance, you could lose your scholarship.

Time for a Recap

✏ A sports scholarship covers all or part of the tuition and living costs for attending a U.S. college.

✏ Athletes must meet the normal university entrance requirements, plus those set by any relevant sporting authorities.

✏ Usually athletes have to do most of the work themselves to obtain a scholarship. To maximize scholarship opportunities, you should start the process about 18 to 24 months ahead of when you wish to begin studying in the United States.

✏ You should prepare a letter of introduction for approximately 70 schools that offer your sport and the academic major that interests you. Letters should be sent to the head coach by name and, ideally, using e-mail. A short history of any sporting achievements should also be included, plus a video if relevant. If you do not hear back, send reminder letters.

✏ If you receive interest from any NCAA schools, you should investigate the procedures for NCAA clearance on the NCAA Web site. Clearance procedures include sending the NCAA your SAT scores. You should not enter the United States without NCAA clearance.

Useful Web Sites

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

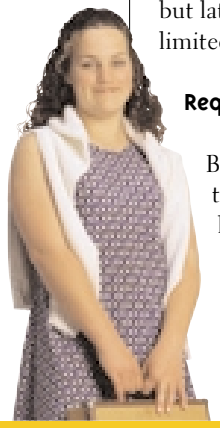
National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)
http://www.naia.org

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

PREPARING A SUCCESSFUL APPLICATION

You should now have a shortlist of colleges that match your needs, interests, and abilities. You should also feel confident that you have the minimum entrance requirements for studying in the United States, and that you can meet the costs of a U.S. undergraduate education. Now it's time 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 the United States. See chapter 9 for a summary of the timeframe 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.



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, keeping in mind any postage costs you may have to pay. You may have a clear idea of exactly which schools you will be applying to and request information

only from those. 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 also put their college catalogs onto their Web sites, and some have even stopped printing paper copies. Many also have on-line application forms that can be completed on the computer and sent back to the university electronically, or the forms can be downloaded and printed. If there is an on-line application, you should use it. This is the quickest method for submitting your application. If you can download the application, appropriate parts of the catalog, and other information from a college's Web site, you will not need to contact the school directly. Also, college Web sites increasingly offer other features, such as video tours of their campuses.

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 or e-mail request separately to each school. Include the information detailed in the section below, "What to Include," in your written request. Or, you may prefer to submit a preliminary application form instead; contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center for copies of these forms.

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 if you require the entire catalog. Check to see if your nearest information or advising center has copies of catalogs you need. If you do not receive, or cannot find, all the information you require, write or e-mail again to the international undergraduate admissions office and ask the specific questions you wish to have answered.

E-mail is an easy way to obtain an application and other materials, and U.S. universities are usually quick to respond. However, sometimes you may need to make a telephone call to follow up on a particular item. In that case, send a fax or e-mail ahead of time, telling the appropriate person that you will be telephoning, when you will call, and what you wish to discuss.

When to Send Your Inquiry

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

Where to Send Your Inquiry

Address your requests for information to the Office of International Undergraduate Admissions. Be brief but clear in your request. Be sure to include the full zip (postal) code for the institution on the envelope to ensure that your letter reaches its destination as quickly as possible. You may also send these inquiries by e-mail.

What to Include

- ✏ name, address, age, and nationality (always be consistent in the spelling of your name and address);
- ✏ your secondary school diploma or examination results that you have obtained or that you will obtain;
- ✏ any postsecondary study you have undertaken (if applicable);
- ✏ the degree and subject you would like to major in (if known), and the proposed starting date;

- ✏ how you expect to finance your studies — if you need financial assistance from the university, inquire about the possibilities;
- ✏ results of TOEFL, SAT, and any other admissions tests, if already taken.

Registering for the 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 SAT I and SAT II Subject Tests. Remember that you cannot take both the SAT I and SAT II 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. As with the SAT, make sure your test results reach colleges before their deadline dates. If you feel that you qualify for a TOEFL waiver, contact the universities directly and explain your circumstances. At least one to two months before the test dates, find out about test preparation materials and any other help you may need. Your information or advising center can give you further information.

Completing and Returning the Application Materials

Once you have received information from the colleges, read everything 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 it specifically asks you 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 names and addresses of your schools, employers, examinations, and awards in full. 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 receive. Remember that it is acceptable for you to write "undecided" on 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 either by a dollar check drawn on a U.S. bank or an international money order obtainable from banks or American Express offices. Check the school's application forms, Web site, or catalog for the current cost.

Academic Credentials

Each college will specify the types of official records it requires to document past education. In American 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.

The U.S. college may furnish special forms on which school authorities are asked to write your grades and your academic performance relative to other students in your secondary school. If such forms are not provided, your school still will 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 an envelope sealed by your school or sent directly from the school.

U.S. colleges either will evaluate your grades and documents themselves, or they sometimes require international applicants to pay an outside company, called a credential evaluator, to evaluate your documents.

In addition to a transcript, you must also send certified copies of the originals of secondary school diplomas, certificates, final examination results, or records of your performance in any national or leaving examinations administered in your home country. Do not send original documents unless there is no alternative; 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 U.S. educational information and 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 American 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 SAT I or SAT II, TOEFL, or other examinations, you should know which universities you wish to apply to. In this way, you will be able to specify at that time 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, also include a photocopy of your test score reports, if possible. The admissions office can more easily match the official scores with your application, 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 the admissions officers want to know about you. The important thing, however, is to be positive: reflect on what experiences meant for you, how they changed you, what you learned."**
>
> *— Molecular biology and genetics 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

"I would say the most important part of an application is the essay...it's your chance to get across that you've got something extra, an edge."

— Mathematics student from Ghana

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. In general, essay questions either require a specific response or are open-ended. Colleges look for certain qualities for their student body 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 a U.S. institution, and your reasons for your chosen field of study. Admissions officers 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.
- ✏ Get others to proofread it for grammatical and spelling errors.

DO NOT:
- ✏ Lie.
- ✏ 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 to the school.

- ✏ Turn down the college's invitation 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 picking out fake essays or those written by parents. The essay is your opportunity to tell the college why they should accept you over other students — use it as such.

Recommendations

"Anecdotes are much better than strings of adjectives and adverbs."

— Associate Dean of Admissions, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

You will usually be asked for at least two recommendations. These may come from the head or principal of your school, your school counselor, your personal tutor, or any teachers who know you well. Your recommenders must be able to write about your work and be able to 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 American teachers are very helpful 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 meeting your college expenses, and must be 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 operate a needs-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 document fully your source(s) of income.

Deadlines and Submission

Each university sets its own deadline date, and it is usually firm about not accepting applications after that time,

particularly if a college is very popular. Deadlines usually fall between January and March, although they can be as early as November or as late as June. If, however, a college indicates that it operates "rolling admissions," late applicants may still have a fair chance of acceptance. In this case, a university will admit and reject 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.

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 application 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 material gets lost in the mail; you will be relieved to know that 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 some time in January. Colleges that use the quarter system (three terms) may offer admission both in the winter term (January) and the spring term (March). The precise date differs for each institution. Deadlines for mid-year admissions are usu-

ally 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 because they are unable to be interviewed. However, 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, learn more about the school directly from former students, and ask any questions you may have.

Common Application Form

This standardized application form is available on the Web at http://www.commonapp.org, and is used by over 130 colleges and universities. These institutions guarantee that they will give equal consideration to the Common Application and to their own forms. One copy of the form can be downloaded from the Web and may be available at your U.S. educational information or advising center. You can make as many copies as you need and send them to as many participating institutions as you wish. It has been pointed out that although the Common Application Form simplifies the college application process, a standard form may not allow you to tailor your application to the particular features of the individual colleges. Each form lists participating colleges and universities with their addresses and admissions information.

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, write to the colleges you turn down so that they can make offers to those students still on waiting lists. It is also recommended 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.

Time for a Recap

✏ Decide which colleges you are interested in and write or send an e-mail message to the Director of International Undergraduate Admissions for 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. 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.

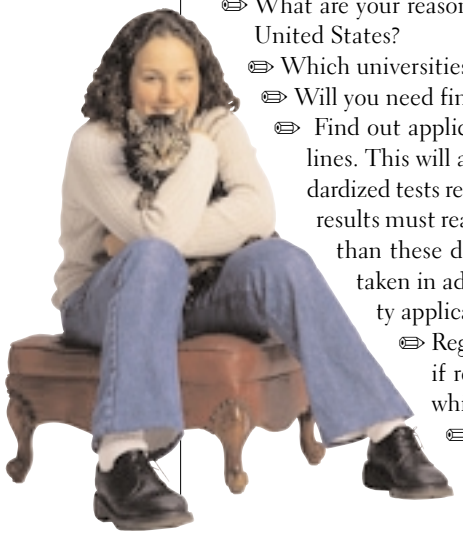
Useful Web Sites

Many college search sites also include tips for making successful applications and access to on-line application forms:
http://www.collegeboard.org
http://www.collegenet.com
http://www.collegeview.com

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 to consider, research, and do the following:



- ✏ 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 choices 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 to take the TOEFL and SAT I and SAT II, if necessary.

September — December

- ✏ Request an official transcript from your school.
- ✏ Request letters of recommendation from your teachers.
- ✏ Submit completed 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, complete and return any forms they require.
- ✏ Send letters of regret 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

- ✏ Apply to your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for a visa upon receipt of your I-20 form and well in

advance of your departure date (see chapter 11, "Applying for a Student Visa," in this booklet).

✏ Make travel arrangements.

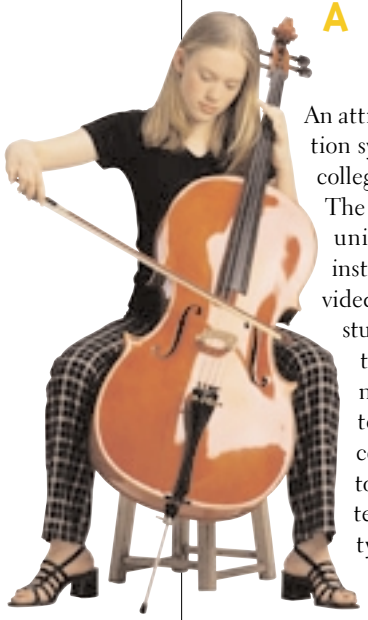
✏ Contact the International Student Office at your university with details of your arrival plans, and confirm details of any orientation for new students held by the university.

Getting Ready to Go

Once you know that you are going to study in the United States, you will probably have many 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*, located on Web site http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

Most U.S. educational information and advising centers conduct pre-departure orientation presentations in the summer, and some may also offer sessions mid-year. Contact your nearest center for their schedule and to reserve space for these popular events. 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, provided certain criteria are met. Over 1million students transfer to a new college each September,[1] 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. The information in this chapter is designed to give you a better understanding of the challenges involved and help make your transfer process as smooth as possible.

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. Transferring after three years of study becomes more difficult but varies between col-

leges. 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 colleges to which you wish to transfer, 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 you may be asked to provide about your original institution, course syllabuses, and so on. While schools can usually give you an unofficial estimate at the time they issue your letter of acceptance, often you must wait until you arrive at the college and meet the head of the department to get an official final evaluation of your transfer status.

Students may find that some of the courses taken at their original institutions are "lost" in the transfer process. They often need extra time to graduate or need to 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 in from a previous institution. Contact schools directly or use reference material available at your U.S. educational information or advising center for further information on specific transfer policies.

Students are required to take three main types of courses in order 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 that are 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. However, 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 you are discussing with a college how many transfer credits you will receive, it is important to check and understand the distinction between a 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 cer-

tain major (for example, mathematics or history) at the transfer institution.

The College Handbook for Transfer Students[2] 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. Prerequisites are preparatory courses that are required before you can start studying for the major itself.
- ✏ 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 them to make a decision in your favor.

Transferring From Outside the U.S. Education System

Students transfer every year 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. 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. The types of institutions in other countries also vary from those in the United States, as do other details.

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. Pat Parker, assistant director of admissions for international students at Iowa State University,[3] identifies three factors that U.S. universities usually consider:

- ✏ 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 prospectuses, syllabuses, or 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 in particular the major, that 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.

In addition, to make the transfer process run as smoothly as possible, you are 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. They should also include:
— summaries or outlines of the major topics covered in each course (If an outline is not available, write a summary yourself and have it certified by the school as accurate.);
— 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.

✏ Prepare a list of textbooks used in each course as this will help in any decisions that are made after you arrive at the campus about whether to grant credit for particular courses.

✏ 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.

In addition to the above, you will also need to provide the same items as freshman applicants to the college, includ-

ing recommendations, transcripts, admissions test scores, and an application essay. See chapter 8 for advice on how to put together a successful college application.

Lastly, remember that transferring is not an easy way into the more selective universities; in fact, many of the more competitive colleges have even 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, which allows you to get a better idea of how competitive the entry is to a particular institution as a transfer student.

Time for a Recap

✏ 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 complicated 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 just as, if not more, competitive as freshman admission, and it requires the same amount of time to research institutions and put together successful applications.

✏ You may 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 Web Sites

Students should check admissions policies for transfer students on individual university Web sites. See chapter 2 for sites with university homepage listings.

[1,2] *The College Handbook for Transfer Students 1997*. 1996. College Board Publications, New York, N.Y.

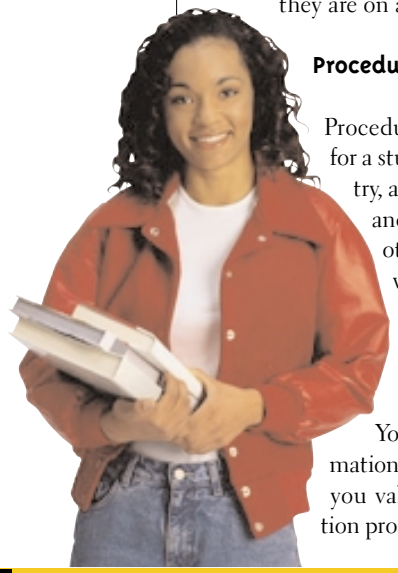
[3] *Advising for Study in the United States: A Manual for Educational Advising Professionals*. 1998. College Board Publications, New York, N.Y.

APPLYING FOR A STUDENT VISA

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 one final task: applying for your student visa.

Visa Types

The most common student visa is the F-1, though a small number of students travel to the United States on an M-1 visa if they are completing a program of hands-on technical or vocational training, or on a J-1 visa if they are on a sponsored exchange program.



Procedures for Your Country

Procedures and requirements for applying for a student visa vary from country to country, and inevitably they are more complex and demanding in some countries than others. There are a number of places where you can obtain more information on the visa application process in general and the specific requirements for your country.

Your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center will be able to give you valuable information on the application procedures for your country. If at all possible, attend one of the pre-departure orientation programs they have organized; it will almost certainly include information on applying for a visa. They may also produce written pre-departure materials.

Your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate can provide application forms and specific details of the application procedure. They often have telephone information lines and Web sites that provide this information.

Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*, covers the visa application in more detail. It is available on the Web site of the U.S. Department of State at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

There are several things you can do to increase your chances of a favorable visa decision:

- ✏ Start the process at least two months in advance of your departure date.
- ✏ Assemble all the documentation that can help make your case.
- ✏ Make sure you are well prepared if you are required to attend an interview.

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

> **"Give the U.S. embassy no excuse to question your academic standing, and show in as many ways as possible that you will return home."**
>
> — *Computer science student from the United Kingdom*

To apply for an F-1 student visa you must have a valid I-20 form, for the J-1 visa you must have the IAP-66 form, and for the M-1 visa, an I-20M-N form. Your college will send you the appropriate form after you have been admit-

ted and after you have certified your available finances. When your form arrives, check the following:

✏ Is your name spelled correctly and in the same form as it appears on your passport?

✏ 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 expires and cannot be used after the reporting date.

If your I-20, I-20M-N, or IAP-66 is valid, you are ready to apply for the visa.

The visa interview usually lasts an average of three minutes, so you must be prepared to be brief yet convincing. Be confident, do not hide the truth, or lie — U.S. consular section staff have a lot of experience and can easily identify when people are not being truthful about their visa application.

In order to issue your visa, the consular officer must be satisfied on three counts:

✏ First, are you a bona fide student? The officer will look at your educational background and plans in order to assess how likely you are to enroll and remain in college until graduation. If you are required to have an interview, be prepared to discuss the reasons you chose a particular college, your anticipated major, and your career plans. Bring school transcripts, national examination results, and SAT or TOEFL scores (if these tests were required by your college), and anything else that demonstrates your academic commitment.

✏ Second, are you capable of financing your education? The U.S. government needs assurances that you won't drop out of school or take a job illegally. Your I-20 form will list how you have shown the university you will cover your expenses, at least for 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? Your chances are improved if your parents are sponsoring your education. If anyone other than your parents is sponsoring you, you should explain your special relationship with this person, justifying a commitment of thousands of dollars to your education.

Provide solid evidence of your sponsor's finances, especially sources and amounts of income. This assures the consular officer that adequate funds will be available throughout your four-year college program. If your sponsor's income is from several different sources (such as salary, contracts, consulting fees, a farm, rental property, investments), have the sponsor write a letter listing and documenting each source of income.

✏ Third, are your ties to home so strong that you will not want to remain permanently in the United States? Under U.S. law, all applicants for non-immigrant visas are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. Note that if you are travelling on a J-1 visa, a two-year rule usually applies, whereby, after you have finished your studies in the United States, you cannot apply for an immigrant visa for the United States until you have spent two years in your home country.

Overall you must be able to show that your reasons for returning home are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. The law states that you must

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 may own or stand to inherit, and your own economic potential when you come home with a U.S. education. The consular officer will be impressed to see evidence of your career planning and your knowledge of the local employment scene.

For family and social ties, the consular officer may ask how many close family members live in your home country, compared to those living in the United States. What community or school activities have you participated in that demonstrate a sincere connection to your town or country? What leadership, sports, and other roles have distinguished you as a person who wants to come home and contribute your part?

Visa Refusals

If your application is refused, the consular officer is required to give you an explanation in writing. However, this is often a standardized reply and is unlikely to go into the details of your specific case. You do have the right to apply a second time, but if you reapply, make sure to prepare much more carefully; the consular officer will need to see fresh evidence sufficient to overcome the reasons for the first denial.

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

Time for a Recap

- Most students enter the United States on an F-1 visa, but some may travel on a J-1 or an M-1 visa.
- You must familiarize yourself with the application requirements for your country and prepare your application thoroughly well in advance.
- Before applying, check that the I-20 form (IAP-66 form for the J-1 visa or I-20M-N form for the M-1 visa) you received from your university is valid.
- Ensure that you can demonstrate to the consular officer that you are a bona fide student, that you can finance your education, and that you 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.

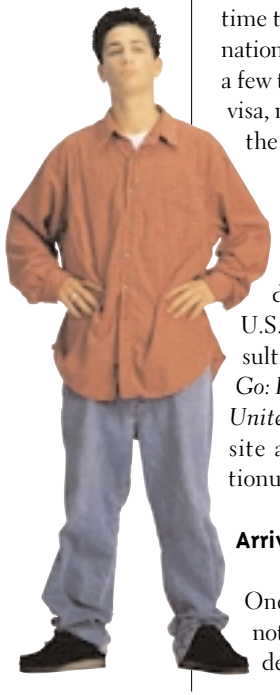
Useful Web Sites

Information on Student Visas
http://www.travel.gov/visa_services.html

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY LIFE

"I have found the university's concern and provision for international students first rate. Advice on academic and financial matters has been excellent."

— Pre-law student from the United Kingdom



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. You should obtain more detailed pre-departure advice by contacting your U.S. educational information or advising center or consulting Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*, on the U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

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 procedures for your arrival on campus. These should include details of the best way to reach the campus.

Orientation

U.S. universities hold arrival orientations for new international students to familiarize them with the campus and its facilities and to help with adjustment to life in the United States. The orientation lasts up to one week and may be compulsory or 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 so on. 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 any matters relating to international students at the college — usually known as international student advisers (see below).

"Remember to take some pictures and some good music. And little gifts from home are always a hit!"

— Economics student from Ghana

International Student Adviser (ISA)

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 go to these staff members to ask any questions related to your status as an international student. They are also there to help in case you are having any problems or have any concerns. Throughout the year they and the International Student Office usually organize social and cultural events for international students.

ACADEMIC ADVISER (AA)

In addition to your ISA, you will be assigned an academic adviser (AA) who is usually a faculty member in your major field (if you have specified one). You usually meet with your AA before registering for classes to be advised 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 be sharing a room in a university dormitory or apartment with at least one other student. One advantage of this is that if your roommate is American, he or she might take you home at holidays and introduce you to American culture. Some housing offices may require you to complete a questionnaire before you arrive so that they can best match you with a roommate. Rooms come furnished and are usually equipped with a telephone line. Bathroom facilities are usually shared. You are usually assigned first-year housing, but the further you progress in your degree program, the more choice you will have about the housing that is assigned. 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 a particular academic area, cultural background, or leisure interest. 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, and an environmental house.

Money and Banking

The United States has very few national banks, and most operate on a regional, state, or city basis. Some universities have their own credit unions or other banking services. Before opening an account find out which banks are near to 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 the university's policy or by purchasing your own policy that meets the university's requirements. Health insurance policies vary and your international student adviser can explain them to you 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.

Social Life

> **"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, including Americans. 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 too. Most campuses have a Student Activities Office that can tell you what is happening on campus.

Time for a Recap

✏ 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* (see Web site listing on page 109).

✏ You should plan to arrive at the university in time to attend the orientation organized for international students on campus.

✏ Get to know the international student advisers (ISAs) at your university who will help you with any problems or concerns you have. They also organize events for international students.

✏ Your academic adviser (AA) will advise you regarding meeting the requirements for your degree and any academic questions you have.

✏ Contact the housing office on campus as soon as you know which college you will be attending. 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 to you.

✏ 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 their return. Check with the university as to 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 Web Sites

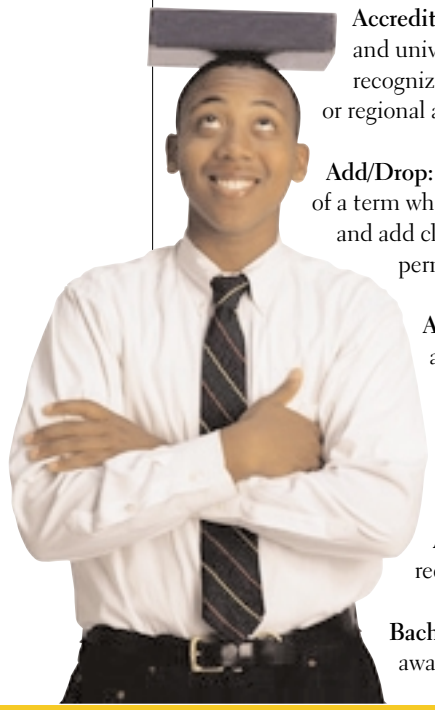
Pre-Departure Information
http://www.edupass.org
http://www.new2usa.com

Pre-Departure Guide With Listings of Useful Web Sites
If You Want to Study in the United States, Booklet Four — *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

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.

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

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).

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

Bachelor's degree: Degree awarded upon completion of

approximately four years of full-time study in the liberal arts and sciences or professional subjects.

College: A post-secondary 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 commutes into campus every day for classes.

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

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

Final: 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 and philanthropic organizations found on many U.S. campuses.

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 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.

Liberal arts: A term referring to academic studies of subjects in the humanities, the social sciences, and the sciences. Also called "liberal arts and sciences" or "arts and sciences."

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.

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.

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.

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

Quarter: Period of study of approximately 10 to 12 weeks' duration.

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.

Scholastic assessment test (SAT): A primarily multiple-choice test of mathematics and English abilities that is required by many U.S. colleges and universities 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, graduate school.

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

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.

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.

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 required of applicants whose native language is not English.

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.

Trimester: Period of study consisting of approximately three equal terms of 16 weeks during the academic year.

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

University: A large post-secondary institution that offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In addition to the general guides listed below, there are many books available that provide information on individual subject areas, colleges in different geographic areas of the United States, and colleges with specific religious or other affiliations. Consult your nearest U.S. educational information and advising center as to which books they have available, or where else you can obtain more specialized publications to meet your particular needs.

General Guides to Colleges

The College Board College Handbook. Published annually. The College Board, Washington, D.C.

The College Board Index of Majors and Graduate Degrees. Published annually. The College Board, Washington, D.C.

The College Board International Student Handbook. Published annually. The College Board, Washington, D.C.

Peterson's Colleges and Universities in the United States — The Complete Guide for International Students. 1998. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Peterson's Guide to Distance Learning Programs. 1999. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Peterson's Four-Year Colleges. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Peterson's Two-Year Colleges. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Choosing and Applying to U.S. Universities

America's Best Colleges. Published annually. U.S. News and World Report, Washington, D.C.

College Handbook for Transfer Students. 1999. The College Board, Washington, D.C. (out of print)

Colleges With Programs for Students With Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders. 1997. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Insider's Guide to College Admissions. 1999. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Princeton Review: Best 331 Colleges, Ed Custard and The Princeton Review. Published annually. Princeton Review Publishing, New York, N.Y.

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

Financial Aid — Including Sports Scholarships

The College Board Scholarship Handbook. Published annually. The College Board, Washington, D.C.

Funding for United States Study: A Guide for International Students and Professionals, Marie O'Sullivan, Editor. 1996. Institute of International Education, New York, N.Y.

Peterson's Scholarships for Study in the USA and Canada. 1999. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Peterson's Scholarships and College Athletic Programs. 1999. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Princeton Review: Student Athlete's Guide to College, Hilary Abramson. 1999. Princeton Review Publishing, New York, N.Y.

Pre-Departure Guides

Also see Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*, available on the Web at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/

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

NAFSA's International Student Handbook: The Essential Guide to University Study in the USA. 1998. Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.

The Ultimate College Survival Guide, Janet Farrar Worthington and Ronald Farrar. 1998. Peterson's, Princeton, N.J.

Academic adviser (AA) 106
Accelerated programs 64
Accreditation 3,10,26,35,36,47
Advanced standing 39,64
American College Testing Assessment (ACT) 52,54,55
Application checklist 86-88
Application fee 76
Application forms
- College 73,76,83,85
- Visa 99

Application materials 72-73,75
Associate degree 3,14,16,25,27-28
Bachelor's degree 14,16,19,24,25,27,64,89
Choosing a college 32
- Academic considerations 35
- Ivy League 44
- Rankings 45,47
- Students with disabilities 29,45-46,47
- U.S. educational information and advising centers 32-33
- Visiting campuses 34
- Web sites and e-mail 33

College environment 42
College fairs 12,34
College searches 33-34
Common application form 83
Community colleges 11,14,16,24-31,51,64,89
- Accreditation 26
- Admission 28
- Associate degree 25
- Certificate programs 26
- Classroom experience 30
- Continuing education 26
- Costs 29
- Financial aid 29
- Programs of study 25
- Student life 29
- Transfer and articulation agreements 27

Consultants and recruiting agents 35
Core courses 20
Credit system 20,89
Credit transfer 90
Deadlines
- Admissions tests 49-50,52,54,75
- College applications 81-82,86-87

Disabled students 29,45-46,47

Distance education 3,17,18
Elective courses 21,91
Employment 63
Entrance requirements 48-55
English language ability 49-51
Secondary school diplomas/examination results 48
Financial statement 56,63,81
Fraternities and sororities 42-43
Grade point average (GPA) 22,38
Grades 21,48,64,77
Graduate study 3,36
Health insurance 57,59,107
Housing 41,106
International student adviser (ISA) 105
Interviews 83
Ivy League 44
Liberal arts 14,37,39
Living costs 58-59,64
Loans 62,66
Major 14,21,25,27,37,38,39,90,91,92,93,106
Major courses 21
Mid-year admissions 82-83
Minor courses 21
Money and banking 107
Non-degree study 17-18
Orientation 45,88,99,105
Personal statement (essay) 78-80,95
Private universities 15-16,38,57
Professional education 15
Professional study 3
Quarter 20
Rankings 45,47
Recommendations 80-81,96
Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) 38,52-54
Semester 20
Sports scholarships 67-71
Spring break 20
Standardized admissions tests 51-55
American College Testing Assessment (ACT) 52,54,55
Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) 38,52-54
State (public) universities 15,16,57
In-state tuition 15
Out-of-state tuition 15
Technical and vocational colleges 16-17

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) 28,49-51,61, 75,78, 100
Test registration 49-54,87
TOEFL waivers 50
Transcripts 77,87,90,96,100
Transfer 11,14,16,25,27,36,89-97
Between U.S. institutions 91-92
From outside the United States 92-95
Transfer application 95-96
Trimester 20
Tuition and fees 29,57
Tuition waivers 64
U.S. educational information and advising centers 3,11-12, 32-33,34,35,36,37,43,47,50,52,54,57,58,61,68,73,75,77,83, 88,90,98,104
Locating 12
Visa application procedures 98-103
Visa refusals 102
Visa types 98