



PLANNING YOUR COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY SEARCH



The first question any prospective university student must answer is:

"Where do I want to study and why?"

Many students choose the United States as the place to continue their education. Some are U.S. citizens living abroad, so returning to the States for college or university is logical. Others are international students who seek a U.S. educational experience. In either case, the diversity of the more than 3000 U.S. colleges and universities gives students many options — whether the program of study is offered in the U.S. or at some other location elsewhere in the world.

Each year many students choose U.S. programs because of their quality and worldwide reputations. They also appreciate the flexibility of the U.S. system — not having to choose a major right away if you do not want to do so; studying in several fields simultaneously; changing majors and not having to start over — is an attraction for many students. So are the informality of student-teacher relationships on many U.S. campuses and the access students have to faculty inside and outside the classroom. Also, each year students tell us that, unlike national universities in their home countries, they enjoy studying and living on a campus community.

Whatever your reasons, from this point forward we will assume you want to consider an undergraduate degree program from a U.S. accredited institution either in the U.S. or at another location around the world where that program is offered.

NOTE: In the U.S. the terms "college" and "university" are used interchangeably.

The Council of International Schools appreciates the use of material in this brochure that has been adapted from material of the College Board and DePauw University's Admissions Counseling Service.

Here is a list of things to do as you plan your search:

1. **THINK** about your priorities and write them down.
2. **TALK** to your counselor, teachers, parents, friends, and the alumni of various colleges. Consider approaching people who may have information on colleges that might meet your needs, such as: current students, visiting admission officers, Council of International Schools tour participants or student advisors at United States Information Services offices or Bi-National Educational Commissions.
3. **READ** as much as you can about U.S. higher education. Start with general college guides and view video materials, if they are available. Use the Internet to look at college websites. Then write an e-mail to the colleges that interest you and ask for general information, as well as information on your special interests.
NOTE: Include the following information about yourself: full name, complete address, including country and postal code, country of citizenship, secondary school, year you plan to enroll in college.
4. **LIST** the colleges/universities that interest you the most. The schools you list should vary in terms of selectivity and should include at least one school where you know you will be accepted. (Your college counselor may be especially helpful here.)
5. **CONTACT** Admission officers. Find out who handles international applicants. Ask each college/university how it defines international students and if there are separate applications. Find out what standardized testing may be required. See what kind of financial aid may be available. Do they require an interview? Are there alumni representatives in my country with whom I can speak?
6. **VISIT** the colleges/universities on your list if at all possible. Spend as much time as you can on campus, sit in on classes and talk to students, faculty and admission officers. Stay overnight if you have time. Most college admission offices provide this service. Ask specific questions about what it is like to be a student at the college. Most U.S. colleges and universities are open all year and would be happy to assist you in planning your visit.
7. **APPLY** to several colleges and universities. Pay attention to the admission and financial aid application deadlines; it is your responsibility to be sure all of the application materials arrive on time. If you have a clear first choice, you may want to consider an early decision or early notification option. (See glossary for explanation of these terms.) If not, apply to a range of colleges/universities — again, include at least one where you are sure to be admitted.
8. **DECIDE** which college you will attend. Request more information or visit again. Remember, it's your decision!





*The key to finding the best college is knowing what you want . . .
. . . and you do not want!*

Many factors will be important to you and your reasons for choosing a college will differ somewhat from those of your friends or others in your family. The items listed in the following sections were designed to help you define your own college/university selection criteria. You may want to add your own personal priorities to this list.

When you are reading about or visiting a college/university, compare your experience with your criteria. Does the institution meet most or all of your needs?

GENERAL COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY CHARACTERISTICS

- Appearance of campus
- Atmosphere: Are current students happy with their undergraduate experiences?
- Availability of scholarships and financial aid for U.S. citizens and non-U.S. citizens — substantial, limited or none?
- Religious affiliation
- Coed/Single sex
- Cost (special costs for international students)
- Degree of selectivity in admissions
- Degrees offered (Associates, Bachelors, Masters, Doctorate)
- Enrollment
- Facilities
- Location (urban, suburban, rural; climate; cultural opportunities)
- Public or Private
- Student employment opportunities

ACADEMIC LIFE

- Size (size of classes, student/faculty ratio, etc.)
- Quality and availability of faculty (full-time teaching faculty or teaching assistants)
- Curricula or majors
- Liberal arts, professional or proprietary

- Special interest or honors programs
- Flexibility in course selection
- Degree requirements
- Credit/advanced standing for external examinations — A levels, IB, Baccalaureate, Abitur, Maturite, etc.
- Academic calendar (e.g., 2 semesters, 3 terms, quarters)
- Co-operative education or internships
- International study opportunities outside the U.S.
- Library
- Computer facilities
- Particular academic facilities

STUDENT LIFE

- Students (caliber, diversity); number of international students
- Residential or commuter campus
- Support Services for: 1) U.S. Citizens; 2) Non-U.S. Citizens (e.g., international student advisor, orientation program, English as a second language instruction)
- Housing (availability, quality, variety) ; open for international students during holidays?
- Food (variety, meal plans)
- Campus activities (variety, quality and availability of those of personal interest)
- Cultural opportunities
- Social life

LIFE AFTER GRADUATION

- General academic reputation
- Alumni accomplishments
- Admission to Graduate Schools
- Job placement record
- Career planning and placement program





QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED OF ADMISSION REPRESENTATIVES BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Questions frequently asked of admission representatives by international students

(Keep in mind that answers to these questions will vary among institutions.)

- As a U.S. citizen living abroad, am I considered an international student?
- Do the universities to which I am applying have separate applications for international candidates?
- Do I need to interview at the colleges to which I am applying? Do these colleges have alumni representatives in my country with whom I can speak?
- Am I at a disadvantage if I cannot interview at all?
- Do you require standardized testing?
- Do I need to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) if English is my first language?
- Are the institutions to which I am applying familiar with my curriculum and educational system (e.g., A Levels, Baccalaureate, IB)?
- How do I find out about receiving college/university credit for my advanced coursework?
- If I am not a U.S. citizen, how do I obtain a visa to study in the United States?
- What kind of financial aid do you offer?
- If the college/university does not offer need-based financial aid to foreign nationals, is there any other type of money or assistance available (e.g., academic or athletic scholarships, working on campus)?
- Is medical insurance included in the comprehensive cost of attendance?
- May I stay on campus during the summer and/or other holidays to study and/or work?
- May I have a car on campus?
- How accessible is the closest airport?
- How do I find out if there are other students from my school or country attending the universities to which I am applying?

Important information concerning financial aid

The cost of attending a U.S. college or university is high and may be of concern to some families. It is expected that parents and students will contribute what they can towards paying educational costs. However, their combined resources are often not enough to meet the full cost of a college/university education. Most colleges and universities offer need-based financial aid to help such families. A portion of need-based aid comes from the U.S. government and must, by law, be given only to U.S. citizens and permanent residents.

Some colleges/universities also offer financial aid to students who are citizens of other countries, but such aid is often limited and may be very hard to get. Many colleges/universities also offer academic scholarships that are awarded regardless of financial need. Since colleges/universities have different ways of determining eligibility for financial aid, it is suggested that students ask for specific information from each institution in which they are interested.



Commonly used admissions terms and words

ACT Assessment — A standardized examination, offered by the American College Testing Program, required for admission to some U.S. colleges. The three-hour test measures general educational development in English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning.

Advanced Standing — Students may receive credit at many colleges by scoring well on certain national or international examinations, such as the International Baccalaureate, the Advanced Placement tests, the GCE A levels or other international examination programs.

Alumnus — Singular, a graduate of a college/university.

Alumni — Plural of alumnus.

Associate's Degree — The degree awarded for successful completion of a two-year program, usually offered at two-year junior or community colleges.

Bachelor's Degree (Baccalaureate) — The degree awarded upon successful completion of an undergraduate college or university program that normally takes four years of full-time study.

Class Rank — The student's position relative to other fellow students in a graduating class. For example, the student's grade average may rank him or her third among forty-five students. Rank in class is used by colleges to judge how well a student has performed academically, relative to his or her peers.

College Counselor — The secondary school staff member responsible for advising students about applying to colleges/universities.

College Work-Study Program — This is a U.S. federally-sponsored program that provides part-time employment for students who demonstrate financial need. Only citizens and permanent residents of the U.S. are eligible to receive these funds.

Cooperative Education Program (Co-op) — A program in which a student alternates between periods of full-time study and full-time employment in related work. In most such programs it takes five years to complete a bachelor's degree.

Course Load — The number of courses taken in a given term.

Credit — The unit of measure representing academic work successfully completed. Also, see advanced standing.

Deferred Admission — This allows an admitted student to delay entrance by a year (or a term).

Early action — An option allowing students to learn of the decision on their application early, but without an obligation to enroll.

Early Admission — A program in which a college admits students to begin their university studies before they graduate from secondary school. These are usually students of exceptional ability.

Early Decision — An option in which students apply in November or December to their first choice college and learn of the decision on their application approximately one month after applying. Accepted students are required to enroll at the college that accepts them.

Elective — An optional course selected by a student. A certain number of electives will count as part of the total number of courses needed to graduate.

Family Contribution — The amount that you and your family should reasonably be able to contribute to the cost of your college education. This is determined by such factors as your parents' income, assets, and debts; your earnings and savings; and the number of children in your family currently in college.

Financial need — The difference between the cost of education at a college and the student's expected family contribution.

Grade (2 definitions) — (1) Indication of the quality of students' academic work. When students complete a course or take a test, they are evaluated and given a grade or mark. (2) Grade can refer to a student's academic level. In the United States, high school seniors are in 12th grade.



Commonly used admissions terms and words (continued)

Grade Point Average (GPA) — A system of evaluating overall student achievement. Most institutions use the following grade conversion scale: A=4, B =3, C=2, D=1 and E and F=0.

Grant — A financial award, also known as scholarship, which does not have to be repaid.

High School — The American term for secondary school.

Honors Program — A special academic program for outstanding students that is especially challenging.

Independent Study — An option that allows students to pursue part of their program by studying independently instead of attending scheduled classes.

Individualized Major — A program that allows students to design their field of specialization.

Intercollegiate — Competition between colleges and universities.

Interdisciplinary — involving two or more academic, scientific, or artistic fields of study.

Internship — An employment opportunity, usually in an area related to academic or career interests, that students may pursue either on or off campus. Some internships are paid positions, but most are opportunities for students to gain valuable experience as unpaid volunteers.

Intramural — Athletic competition between students living in different residence halls or other groups of students within a university.

Liberal Arts — A program of study that emphasizes academic work in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, as opposed to vocational study or training.

Major — A student's area of specialization.

Minor — A student's subordinate specialization.

Profile Form — An application for need-based financial aid.

Rolling Admission — A program through which admission applications are evaluated upon receipt and applicants are notified of the decision as soon as all the required credentials have been received.

Room and Board — Fees that cover room and meal expenses.

SAT I — A standardized examination, offered by the College Board through the Educational Testing Service, required for admission to many U.S. colleges. The three hour test was designed to measure verbal and mathematical skills

SAT II (formerly Achievement Tests) — These are offered by the Educational Testing Service for the College Board in fourteen subjects. The one-hour examinations are designed to measure a student's knowledge of a specific subject, such as history, mathematics or a foreign language.

Semester — Half of an academic year.

Social Security Number — Identification number assigned to American citizens by the U.S. government.

Teaching Assistant (TA) — A student, usually in graduate school, who helps professors with their teaching and advising roles.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) — This three-and-one-half hour multiple-choice examination is designed to measure a student's English language proficiency.

Transcript — The record of a student's academic work.

Transfer — The term describes the process of a student leaving one university or college for another while pursuing their degree.

Trimester — One third of an academic year.

Tuition — The fees that cover academic expenses excluding meals, housing, books, transportation and other personal expenses.

Undergraduate Student — A bachelor's or associate's degree candidate. Once students have earned a bachelor's degree, they are eligible for entry to graduate programs at the master's and doctoral levels.

Waiting List — A list of students who were not initially accepted by a college, but who may be accepted at a later date if space becomes available.

Zip Codes — Postal codes used by the U.S. Postal Service.

For more useful information about planning your college/university search visit CIS Higher Education at:

<http://highered.cois.org/colleges.htm>