

Navigating the US Higher Education System

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- *Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.*

Confucious

- What does this mean for your child/students?

US Institutions

- Always choose an institution which is “accredited.”
- An institution is accredited provided that its program of study, professors, and academic facilities meet the minimum standards established by an agency recognized by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation and by the U.S. Department of Education.
- Accreditation by a regional agency, such as the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools or the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, applies to the institution as a whole.

Community and Junior Colleges

- Provide a two-year course beyond high school or secondary school.
- Courses are either “Terminal,” leading to employment, or “Academic,” preparing students for transfer to a four-year college or university.
- Graduates of junior colleges are usually awarded an Associate in Arts (A.A.) or Associate in Sciences (A.S.) degree.

Liberal Arts College or University

- Offers a university education combining natural and social sciences as well as humanistic studies.
- The term “college” is often used where undergraduate study is concerned.
- The college may be part of a university which also has graduate and professional schools, or it may be an independent institution offering a Bachelor’s degree program, with little if any instruction at the graduate level

The Bachelor's Degree

- Four years of undergraduate study lead to a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Arts or in Science, a B.A. or B.S. degree.
- The Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) or Bachelor of Science (B.S.) degree is awarded on successful completion of a specified number of courses or units and the full degree requirement is usually stated as being 120 credits (about 40 courses) for institutions operating on a semester system, and 180 credits for a quarterly calendar.

Course Loads

- Each course earns “credits” or “units”, which are known as credit hours, semester hours (for schools on the semester system), quarter hours (for schools on the quarter system) or merely hours or credits.
- The undergraduate student program, known as an “academic load,” is normally 15-17 units a semester, or 12 to 15 units a quarter.

The Bachelor's Degree

- A Bachelor's degree program is designed to last four years, the first year being called Freshman year, the second Sophomore, the third Junior, and the fourth Senior.
- Courses in the first two years are referred to as "lower division" courses and in the last two years as "upper division" courses.

Three Types of Course Requirements

- General basic courses are sometimes called “core courses” or “distribution requirements,” and must be taken by all students, usually during their first two years. These comprise about a third of the degree and they include subjects such as English, a foreign language, a natural science, social science and mathematics.
- Courses in which a student wishes to “major,” i.e. specialize, which are mostly taken in the last two years and usually amount to a quarter or more of the total degree requirements.
- “Elective courses” which the student chooses from any field.

Grade Point Average (GPA)

- Students are graded on course work completed, and most colleges and universities use letter grades as follows: A being excellent or outstanding; B means above average; C, average; D, below average; and F, failing.
- An undergraduate student must maintain a C or 2.00 average in general and a B or 3.00 average in his or her major field in order to receive a degree.

GPA Calculation

Grade	Units or Hours	Grade Points	Grade Point Average
A = 4.0	* 3	12	
B= 3.0	* 3	9	
A = 4.0	* 3	12	
B= 3.0	* 3	9	
	12	42	3.5

What School to Select?

- **Relative selectivity** – i.e., how hard it is to get in.
- **Courses of study** – all undergraduate colleges offer degrees in the usual academic fields. Students wishing to take a degree in a professional or more specialized field, such as engineering, forestry, or teaching, must seek out universities or professional schools which offer these degrees
- **Cost:** Higher education is very costly in the United States. Tuition alone varies from approximately \$5,000 in state-supported institutions to \$30,000 in some large private institutions. These figures cover only tuition and do not include transportation, or living expenses.

What School to Select?

- Softer considerations:
- **Size of the college or university:** Enrollment can vary from under 1,000 to about 35,000. Some students feel lost in these very large institutions and, at present, small private colleges show more interest in receiving applications from international or alternatively educated students.
- **Geographical area:** a student looking for a course in petroleum engineering, for instance, will find most courses in this field in petrol-producing areas such as Louisiana, Texas or Oklahoma. Students may increase their chances of success by applying to colleges in less obviously popular areas than California, New York and the Northeast seaboard.
- **Residential facilities:** Some universities in big towns have many commuters, which means there is relatively little campus life, and this is usually a less suitable environment for students wishing to live on campus.

Where Do You See Yourself?

- Try to visualize what the college experience looks like for you.
- What size are the classes?
- What is the environment around you?
- What kinds of clubs or sports goes on?

General Submission Requirements

- Although U.S. educational institutions vary in their procedures and requirements for admission of students from other countries, formal applications usually include most of the following items:
 - Institutional application form;
 - Certified copies of educational documents;
 - Certified translations of these documents if not originally in English;
 - Evidence of English language proficiency;
 - Scores for any required academic entrance examinations;
 - Financial information, with applications for financial aid if requested;
 - Letters of recommendation from teachers;
 - Non-refundable application fee of \$10-\$75.

Understanding Requirements

- Some universities accept students in Spring but the majority work on Fall admittance for international students
- Try to begin work on applications well before the deadline and submit completed applications two or three months before the closing date

Deadlines

- **June – September**

- Select 5 or 6 universities on the basis of their programs, degrees offered, accreditation, level of selectivity, cost, location and size

- **July – August**

- Find out which standardized tests are required (TOEFL, TSE, IELTS, ACT, SAT) and register to take them in October or November.

- **August – September**

- Write to 5 or 6 universities to request application forms for admission and financial aid.

- **October – February**

- request transcripts from your high school and prepare literal translations
- Have teachers or counselors send recommendation letters
- send applications to universities well in advance of deadlines

- **April – June**

- Accept offer of admission from the preferred university.
- Decline offers from other universities where also accepted.
- Contact the university housing office to reserve university owned housing.
- Contact the university Foreign Student Advisor for any specific information concerning arrival and orientation

Application Time

- Instructions for each application will be different. Follow them carefully, paying particular attention to closing dates or deadlines for receipt of completed applications. Allow enough time for mail delivery. Often the closing date for students from other countries is earlier than for U.S. students. Usually applications for scholarships or fellowships must be submitted earlier than applications for admission.
- Try to begin work on applications well before the deadline and submit completed applications two or three months before the closing date. This will allow the institutions time to evaluate the application before the peak of the selection period. If you are applying to a competitive field or to a selective institution, submit your application as early as possible. Many U.S. admissions officers believe that early applications are apt to be considered more favorably than later ones.

Acceptance: Now What?

- Finances:
- <http://www.youtube.com/embed/8OqOrCvA9kw>

Visas, Travel, Packing, Oh My!

- A valid passport and U.S. visa are needed to enter the United States. Students and scholars generally come under the Non-Immigrant Visa Classification, “Exchange-Visitor” or “Student”.
- The possibility for employment is governed by the type of visa under which you enter the United States. In no case can students expect to cover all of their expenses by working while a student in the United States.

More on Visas

- F-1 visas are granted to students wishing to enter the U.S. temporarily, solely for the purpose of study. The student must be a permanent resident of a foreign country with the intention of leaving the U.S. at the end of the study period. To secure an F-1 visa, the student must present the American consul with:
 - 1. a passport valid for the duration of the intended stay
 - 2. a valid form I-20A-B “Certificate of Eligibility”
 - 3. proof of sufficient funds for the duration of his/her stay in the U.S.
 - The student may also be asked to provide proof of language proficiency.

Housing

- Housing is important to book early.
- Inform the university of any specific needs (i.e. same sex dorm)
- Most housing for freshman is on campus. If transfers then can usually live off campus if desired.

Congratulations to Your Graduate

And thank you for your time.