

COMMISSION FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

Between the United States of America, Belgium and Luxembourg

Undergraduate Studies

in the United States



Commission for Educational Exchange

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INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

"Higher education" in the United States means education beyond the secondary school level, or beyond the 12 years normally required to complete elementary and secondary studies. Higher education is offered by colleges, universities, professional schools, teachers' colleges, community and junior colleges, vocational and technical schools and academies of art and music. Higher education degrees are divided into three general categories: associate degrees (typically two years in length, leading to vocational or technical employment); **undergraduate degrees** (typically four to five years in length, leading to bachelor's degrees in a wide range of fields); and graduate degrees (education beyond the bachelor's level, including master's, specialist and doctoral degrees).

Detailed information concerning higher education in the United States may be found at the Commission's Advising Center. The Center works in cooperation with EducationUSA, a network of more than 450 information offices throughout the world. The Advising Center maintains reference books evaluating the specializations offered by institutions, preparation materials and books for entrance exams such as the ACT, SAT, TOEFL, IELTS, GMAT and GRE as well as a myriad of resources concerning study in the U.S. These resources may be consulted at the following address:

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Boulevard de l'Empereur, 4, Keizerslaan

B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

The Advising Center is open to the public Monday-Thursday, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Telephone inquiries are answered each day between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

The Commission is closed to the public on Fridays.

Telephone: +32 (02) 519.57.72

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This information booklet should be useful as a starting point for students interested in higher education in the United States. It should be noted that the Commission for Educational Exchange is not qualified to counsel students in the choice of a career or to judge their aptitude for any particular university specialization. We encourage students to consider the following topics when exploring higher education options in the United States:

- Accreditation p. 2
- Structure of the U.S. higher education system p. 2
- Credit and Grading systems p. 5
- Admission requirements p. 6
- Selecting an institution p. 6
- Application procedures p. 9
- Admission tests p. 15
- Financial aid and employment p. 18
- American visas p. 21
- Commonly used terms in U.S. higher education p. 21
- Commonly used immigration terms p. 32
- Timeline for preparing to study in the U.S. p. 36

ACCREDITATION

When selecting higher education programs in the United States, students should always choose an institution that is **accredited**. Unlike many European countries, the United States does not have a National Ministry of Education that “recognizes” higher education institutions. Rather, Americans rely on various accrediting agencies to verify the quality of higher education institutions. These accrediting agencies must be approved by the Council on Postsecondary Accreditation and by the U.S. Department of Education. Accreditation ensures that students’ diplomas and coursework will be recognized by other educational institutions, professional organizations and employers.

An institution is accredited when its program of study, professors and academic facilities meet the minimum standards established by the accrediting agency. Accreditation by a *regional* agency, such as the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools or the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, applies to the institution as a whole and may be awarded for up to four different levels: Associate degree; Bachelor's degree; Master's degree and Doctorate. Accreditation by a *professional* agency applies only to the relevant school or department (e.g. engineering schools/departments are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology). International students should not enroll in degree courses within institutions or departments that are not accredited.

To find out if a program is accredited check the CHEA website: <http://www.chea.org/>

STRUCTURE OF THE U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

While characterized by great diversity, American institutions of higher education are classified into three general categories:

1. Undergraduate Study

Community and Junior Colleges Students have the option to have a stand-alone two-year (typically Associate) degree that is more technical/vocational or to transfer to a four-year institution to complete their university education in a 2+2 arrangement.

Technical Institutes offer two- or three-year courses of training for semiprofessional occupations such as dental, engineering or medical technicians.

Liberal Arts Colleges or Liberal Arts Universities offer university-level education that combines natural and social sciences, as well as humanistic studies. The term "college" is often used where undergraduate study is concerned. A college may be part of a larger university that has graduate and professional schools. A college may also be an independent institution that specializes in Bachelor's degree programs, with little if any instruction at the graduate level. Thus, Harvard College is the undergraduate division of Harvard University. Vassar College, Amherst College and Sarah Lawrence College are examples of independent liberal arts colleges. The academic status of an independent liberal arts college may be just as high as a college which is part of a university.

Fine Arts and Music are often taught in the colleges and universities described above, but

may also be available in specialized academies, schools and conservatories. For more information, please consult the fine arts directories at the Advising Center.

The Bachelor's Degree requires four to five years of undergraduate study in Liberal Arts (B.A. degree) or in Science (B.S. degree). A bachelor's degree (or its equivalent from another country) is required for admission to a graduate level program.

The B.A. or B.S. degrees are awarded upon successful completion of a specified number of courses or units. In the U.S., the full degree requirement is usually 120 credits (about 40 courses) for institutions operating on a semester system. For institutions that follow a quarterly academic calendar, the requirement is 180 credits. A Bachelor's degree program is designed to last four years. The first year is called the Freshman year, the second Sophomore, the third Junior and the fourth Senior. Courses offered during the first two years are referred to as "lower division" courses. "Upper division" courses are taken during the third and fourth years.

Successful completion of secondary education as prescribed by the appropriate educational bodies is required for students to be eligible for admission to the Bachelor's program.

In recent years, many institutions have experimented with variations of the Bachelor's degree structure. A typical pattern includes the following requirements:

- A. Basic courses, which are sometimes called "core courses" or "distribution requirements." These courses must be taken by all students, usually during the first two years of study. These courses comprise about one third of the degree and include subjects such as English, foreign languages, natural sciences, social sciences and mathematics.
- B. Specialized courses in the student's chosen field, which are often referred to as "major" courses. These courses are usually taken during the final two years of study and amount to about one quarter of the total degree requirements.
- C. "Elective"/optional courses which the student chooses from any field.
- D. Students from other countries do not necessarily enter an American college or university as freshmen (first-year students). They may be admitted by the college at a higher level or receive advanced standing, mainly through receiving credits for advanced pre-college work or placement tests. Each college or university in the United States determines entry levels for each student on an individual basis, after acceptance to the university. Students may sometimes complete a Bachelor's degree in less than four years by (a) receiving credits for pre-college work (i.e. the European Baccalauréat, International Baccalaureat (IB), GCE A-levels, Advanced Placement (AP), and more) or (b) taking courses during the summer.

2. Graduate Study

Graduate and Professional Schools provide post-university study leading to the Master's or doctoral degree.

Non-degree students are those who wish to take courses without enrolling for a specific degree. Non-degree students can also be referred to as "special students." Colleges and universities are increasingly reluctant to accept "special students" unless they are enrolled

for a degree in another institution and are seeking instruction that is not available in their home institution. Non-degree students do not have full access to all university facilities, such as athletic, library and computer facilities. There is often a limit on the number of credits for which a non-degree student may enroll.

Master's degrees, such as the M.A., M.S. or M.B.A. require a minimum of one academic year. More often, 18 months or two years are needed. Master's and other professional degrees usually require a minimum of 30 credits and a maximum of 60 credits, with an average grade of "B" for the coursework. Generally two types: Academic with thesis, prepares for further study at the Doctoral level and Professional may have an optional thesis, prepares for career (MPH, MBA, MPP).

Doctoral degrees may be earned in many fields of specialization and require a minimum of four years of study beyond the Bachelor's degree. Often universities will offer Master's and Doctoral degrees in a 2 + 2/3 year arrangement by which the first two years of the Doctoral degree correspond to the Master's curriculum. Most graduate schools do not require that a student fulfill the specific requirements for the Master's degree before becoming a candidate for the doctoral degree, although many students find it desirable to do so. Doctorates in Education, Science and Law are sometimes labeled Ed.D., Sc.D. or J.D. Most doctorates, however, are known as Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) degrees.

To obtain a Ph.D. degree or other doctorate, the university generally requires students to:

- Earn a certain number of credits in a required distribution of courses.
- Maintain an average grade of "B."
- Pass a qualifying comprehensive examination after completion of the required courses.
- Pass examinations in one or more foreign languages.
- Write and defend a thesis that is the result of original research.
- Pass an oral examination.

Degree programs vary by institution. For detailed information about American degrees, consult individual university catalogs and subject reference books, which are available on-line or in the Commission's Advising Center.

3. Postdoctoral Research

Postdoctoral candidates should direct their inquiries to the Chair of the appropriate department, with a copy to the Dean of the School. Please note that postdoctoral research positions are usually arranged between the scholar and department through correspondence, exchange of articles and personal connections between professors. In general, there are no special forms to be completed or admission tests to be taken.

4. Professional Training

Many professions require special training at the post-graduate level. A law degree (J.D.), for example, requires three years of study beyond the Bachelor's degree; a medical degree (M.D.) requires four years of study beyond the Bachelor's degree; and social work (M.S.W.) requires two additional years of training beyond the Bachelor's degree. Completion of general undergraduate work is usually required before admission to the professional program.

CREDIT AND GRADING SYSTEMS

American degrees, both undergraduate and graduate, are earned by successfully completing a prescribed number of courses. Each course carries a certain number of "credits" or "units", which are also referred to as credit hours, semester hours (for schools on the semester system) or quarter hours (for schools on the quarter system). The number of credits assigned to each course usually relates to the number of hours of classroom work involved. For instance, a course that meets three times a week for one hour (or the typical 50-minute class period) will usually carry three credit hours. There are exceptions to this rule. An intensive seminar may meet once a week for two hours and also be classified as a three-credit course. The graduate student's program (or "academic load") is normally 9-12 credits per term. It is typical for a lecture course to have a value of three or four credits. Each institution makes a determination which of these values to adopt as a basis for their credit system. Practice-oriented courses (labs or other practicum) may be awarded lower value of one or two credits. In the United States, students are graded on course work completed and most colleges and universities use the following letter grades to characterize students' results:

- A - excellent or outstanding
- B - above average
- C - average
- D - below average
- F - failing.

Letter grades correspond to a 4-point numerical scale, which are used to determine percentages and grade point averages (GPA):

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade Points
A	93-100%	4.00
B	80-92%	3.00
C	70-79%	2.00
D	60-69%	1.00
F	below 60%	0.00

Some universities use a 10 point scale, 90-100% = A, etc...

A student's academic standing is often measured by his or her grade point average (GPA). This is the average of the grades that a student has earned each term (semester GPA) or throughout the entire academic program (cumulative GPA). The grade point average is calculated by dividing the total number of grade points by the total number of credit hours. For example, a graduate student takes four 3-unit courses with the following results: Business 101 - A; Introduction to Business Law - B; Mass Media and Marketing - A; and Computer Science Techniques applied to Business - B. The average is determined as follows:

Letter Grade	Credit Hours	Grade Points
A = 4.0	x 3	= 12.00
B = 3.0	x 3	= 9.00
A = 4.0	x 3	= 12.00
B = 3.0	x 3	= 9.00

student population.

- **Courses of study.** Students should research universities to make sure they offer studies and degrees in their desired fields: no institution offers every academic subject. The higher specialized the field is (forestry, aeronautics, jazz), the fewer institutions may be offering it. The Commission's Educational Adviser can provide information on universities for most fields.
- **Residential facilities.** In the US, there are two main types of educational institutions – those that offer student accommodation (so called, residential colleges) and those with very limited or no accommodation (commuter schools), where the majority of students come for a day of classes before returning home. Universities with a high percentage of commuting students offer little campus life. This may be less desirable for international students who are seeking social activities and opportunities to interact with American students.
- **Residential life** with its opportunities for interaction and community life may also significantly differ depending on whether the university has a self-contained campus or not. Because of the lack of space and high real estate prices, many urban residential institutions are spread out, and students may need to travel for classes and dormitories. On the other hand, campus-based institutions offer students easy access to academic, athletic, and cultural facilities, and closer community feel.
- **Relative selectivity.** How competitive is the university? What percentages of applicants are actually accepted? How important for you is “ranking”, “prestige” or “reputation” in the choice of university?
- **Costs.** Higher education is very expensive in the United States. Tuition alone may vary from about \$ 10,000 in state-supported institutions to over \$ 50,000 in some private institutions. These figures may cover only tuition and not include room & board, transportation, books, health insurance and/or living expenses.
- **Religion.** Many private institutions in the United States are affiliated with particular religious orders. Students with a strong faith may feel happiest in a college or university founded by their particular denomination.
- **Visiting campus.** International students who can go to the United States to visit universities of their interest may find this helpful in deciding where they prefer to study and live. Such visits do not influence the universities' decision regarding eligibility for admission. It is not entirely necessary to visit, nowadays many universities post YouTube videos, have online tours, etc.

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Admission to an American institution is never automatic. No certificate or diploma guarantees admission. Applicants are considered on the basis of their academic record, references, admission tests, previous experience, preparedness to their field of study, extra-curricular activities, English proficiency, etc. International students compete with American students for available spaces and must follow the same general application procedures as American students. Since admission is not automatic, it is wise to apply to several American institutions simultaneously (to more, if the applicant does not have a good

academic record).

Before seeking further advice, students should try to make a realistic assessment of their academic ability. How have they scored in school examinations? Do they come near the top of their school classes or in the middle? Students should also calculate how much they or their parents can afford to pay for higher education. See the section on finances below.

EducationUSA is the U.S. State Department's official website for international students. This useful resource includes search engines for colleges, universities and specific academic programs. In addition to program listings, EducationUSA also provides information about student visas, financial aid, standardized testing and application procedures.



www.educationusa.state.gov

SAMPLE CRITERIA FOR SELECTING A COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY

The following is a list of issues that students may wish to consider when selecting a university program. Not every item will be important to every student. However, the underlined items are considered to be the basic elements of a university search.

- Academic competition level among students
- Academic program (availability of field of study, dual majors, class size, off-campus opportunities, strength of desired program, etc.)
- Academic requirements for graduation
- Academic and cultural support programs / systems
- Admissions criteria (selectivity: percent of applicants admitted, average test scores, grade point average, importance of interview/recommendations, consideration for extra-curricular achievements and strength of character)
- Advanced placement credit given
- Application deadline
- Athletics facilities
- Backgrounds of other students
- Calendar plan of the college
- Climate
- Consortia opportunities (opportunity to take classes at neighboring universities)
- Cooperative work-study programs
- Cost of attendance and living
- Counseling services available

- Course offerings
- Cultural opportunities on and off campus
- Diversity of student population and surrounding community – ethnic, racial, cultural, socio-economic
- Enrollment (total number of students)
- Environment (appearance of the campus; setting: rural, suburban, urban)
- Extracurricular offerings, sports, clubs, organizations
- Facilities (buildings, grounds, etc.)
- Faculty (professors and instructors: availability, percent holding doctorates)
- Financial aid and scholarship availability
- Geographic location
- Honors programs
- Housing options, campus life opportunities, and quality of residential life
- Library facilities and holdings
- Post-completion placement record (graduate schools, employment)
- Prestige or institutional reputation
- Quality of life and environment immediately surrounding the institution
- Religious affiliation of the institution
- Religious organizations/activities
- Research facilities and opportunities
- Selectivity of the institution
- Student-faculty relationships and ratio
- Transportation (bus service, airport nearby)

APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The academic year, which varies from institution to institution, normally runs from late August or mid-September to early or late May. Optional summer courses are usually available outside the academic year. The academic year is either divided into two terms called "semesters" or into three terms referred to as "quarters." In the latter case, the fourth quarter can be an optional summer term that covers a whole quarter's worth of material in six to eight weeks. It is, therefore, extremely intense and very fast-paced. An above average knowledge of English is required to successfully complete these intensive courses. They are not designed to teach students English. Their objective is to help students catch up on subject material or advance in their program of study more quickly.

1. The Application Process

All students must submit a formal application in order to enroll in an American institution, regardless of academic status or degree intent. The entire application process may take several months. Students should begin requesting (or downloading) admission applications in July and August, one year before the expected date of enrollment. Most institutions make application forms available on the Internet and then request that hard copies of your documents be sent via post. Today, many use a paperless application process, where students apply through either the institution's own site or the Common Application website (commonapp.org.) Common Application is an online application submission service used by hundreds of colleges and universities in the US. Speak to the Admissions office at the college to verify which way they prefer to receive the documents. If you have to present documents on paper, be sure that all correspondence between you and the institution is sent by the fastest possible method (email, fax or air mail). Forms that are sent via surface mail (by sea) may not reach universities in time for application deadlines. If mailing is necessary,

it is advisable to use those services that offer you an ability to track your package. Most universities will take no action on an application until it is *complete* in all respects, including supporting letters of reference, certified copies of academic records, required test scores and payment of application fees. To find application information on university websites, follow the links to “admissions”, “prospective students” or “international students.”

2. Application Deadlines

The deadline for admission applications varies among institutions. Most deadlines for enrollment in the following academic year fall into the period from December to February. Some institutions set special application deadlines for international students.

Application Process

Some institutions may offer two different deadlines, and consequently, two different application processes: early application and regular application. While the required documents and basic evaluation procedures are the same, the difference between early and regular applications is in how early admission decisions are made and announced.

Decisions on early applications are typically made and communicated to the students by the end of December. Possible outcomes are: **admit** the applicant, **deny**, or **defer** to the Regular application pool.

There are two different types of early applications – Early Action and Early Decision. The difference between them is very significant.

Early Action decision is similar to Regular application decision, and is no more than an offer of admission. It is **non-binding**, and the student retains freedom of accepting or rejecting the offer.

Early Decision is a **binding** decision. Once accepted through the Early Decision process, the student **must** commit to the institution and withdraw his or her applications from all other colleges to which he or she applied.

Regular application decisions are typically released in late March-April. Possible outcomes are: **admit**, **deny**, **wait-list**. Some institutions may offer admission to either September or January (if such an option is available.) Wait-listed students may be offered full admission at a later time, typically after May 1. The 1st of May is the nation-wide deadline for students to accept admission offer.

3. Mid-Year Admissions

The most typical time to begin academic programs in the United States is the Fall (September) term. However, some institutions accept admission applications for each of their academic terms. If the university operates a semester plan, mid-year admission falls sometime in January. Universities operating a quarterly calendar will sometimes admit students at the beginning of Fall (September), Winter (January) or Spring (March) quarters. Please note that most universities provide special orientation and support programs for international students each Fall (September) term. Many students find it advantageous to begin their U.S. studies during this time. Highly competitive institutions (and some graduate programs) do not accept mid-year admissions. In some cases, institutions may not allow

mid-year admission to some specific individual programs.

Details concerning the rules and requirements of an American institution are published in a program (often referred to as a university “catalog”). These catalogs can be found on the web sites of individual institutions.

4. Application Materials

Students who do not have Internet access should request application forms directly from each university. Requests for application materials should include: student’s full name, country of citizenship, contact details, academic preparation, proposed course of study and desired degree level.

Although application procedures vary slightly among institutions, international student applications usually require the following materials:

- Institutional application form
- Non-refundable application fee (costs range from \$25 to \$100)
- Certified copies of educational documents (academic transcripts)
- Certified translations of these documents if not originally in English
- Scores for any required entrance examinations
- Evidence of English language proficiency (typically results of standardized tests)
- Undergraduate admissions, an essay on a given topic and/or personal statement
- Letters of recommendation from teachers or professional colleagues
- Financial information, with applications for financial aid if requested. Financial documents may include a completed Declaration and Certification of Finances and a bank statement.
- Portfolio for admission into some art or creative programs
- Any other documents that may enhance the application, based on an evaluation process specific to the institution – certificates of academic accomplishments, extra-curricular achievements, athletic and artistic distinction.

Institutional application forms. Be sure to follow all application instructions carefully. Forms and letters should be typewritten, computer generated or printed clearly in black ink. The spelling of the applicant’s name should be consistent throughout the application. Use the same name order as well, and indicate the family name by underlining it or writing it in all capital letters (for example: Richard John SMITH). If different parts of the application will reach the university separately (for example, test scores or recommendation letters), the applicant name must match the original application form in order to be filed appropriately. Admission files may not become active until they are complete; so until all items arrive and are placed together, no action may be taken. To help admissions officers keep all documents in a single place, students should attach a note to each document that bears a different name or different spelling that may have been used (identify the same first, second and family name that was used on the original application form). Whenever possible, applicants are advised to use the name that is listed on the passport.

The applicant’s listed address must include all information required for postal delivery. When listing telephone numbers, please include (and note) country codes and city codes. Also remember that Americans record the date in the following order: month-day-year. Many Americans also find European handwritten numbers difficult to read (again, typing or computer printing is strongly preferred).

Most universities require a non-refundable application fee. Payment should be enclosed with the application materials. Cash and/or Eurocheques are not accepted by U.S.

institutions. Students must use an international money order (available from any American Express Office) or a check drawn from an American bank account. IMPORTANT!!- Be sure that the applicant's full name is listed on the check or money order.

Try to begin working on applications well before the deadline and submit completed applications two or three months before the closing date. This will allow the institutions adequate time to evaluate the application before the peak of the selection period. If applying to a competitive field or to a selective institution, submit applications as early as possible. Many U.S. admissions officers believe that early applications are apt to be considered more favorably than later ones.

Some students find it helpful to download and photocopy the official application form before it is completed, and to practice on a copy before completing the final version. Common Application online service will allow students to make multiple edits to the application before submitting it.

Be certain to respond to all questions on the application form. If a specific question does not apply to your situation, make a note to that effect and explain why this is so. Keep copies of all application forms and documents submitted. It is also helpful to keep a record of when materials were mailed and where.

Once the application is received, most institutions send a letter of welcome or a note that thanks students for their interest in the institution. A letter of welcome from an individual professor or a letter verifying receipt of your application does NOT constitute an official admission to the university. When in doubt, ask the Advising Center to interpret correspondence from American institutions. Respond promptly to any requests for additional information from any and all universities to which you have applied. These requests may be for specific course descriptions; additional information about your financial situation; or for an additional writing sample in English. With more and more universities going paperless, such requests may be in the form of email or online notification accessible on the institution's website. Students are advised to provide universities with valid email addresses and assure that the university's messages are not blocked by their email software.

Certified copies of educational documents. Each institution will specify the type of official records it requires to evaluate past education. Usually, admissions officers will want the student's entire academic record for secondary courses. U.S. institutions often prefer that transcripts of previous educational work be sent directly from the former schools. The institution may also furnish special forms on which school authorities are asked to write the applicant's grades and academic performance relative to other students in the institution. If such forms are not provided, the applicant or the school will be expected to submit official documents that provide this type of information. If the admissions officer requests an explanation of the grading and class ranking system or descriptions of courses that have been taken, this information should be furnished by an official of the applicant's school or university if possible. As requested, send certified copies of grade sheets, diplomas, degrees or professional titles, or copies of the comprehensive examination results 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 university or certified by this Commission.

If English translations are necessary, students may translate the documents themselves. Such translations must also be certified at the Commission. To have copies or translations certified at the Commission, bring the original and one copy of the translation. After the translation has been reviewed, additional certified copies can be made at the Commission.

Students who have taken courses in the United States or at an institution in their home country can inquire about applying those courses towards the new degree program. Certified copies of course transcripts must be included with the application. In most cases, admissions officers cannot give full estimates of accepted credit in advance of admission. This is because, in most cases, awarding credit toward a degree at a particular institution involves making sure that each course is roughly equivalent to a course at that institution. An exact number of transfer credit may not be available until a student has been enrolled for several months. No credit will be awarded for courses that have been applied to a previous degree, nor will academic credit be awarded for courses designed to fulfill requirements for a technical/vocational program.

Applicants must submit officially reported results (scores) for any required examinations. For example, most colleges and universities will require the TOEFL or IELTS score to demonstrate English language proficiency. Some institutions may require additional entrance examinations such as the ACT or SAT. Please refer to the admission testing section for more information.

Statement of educational purpose. Some applications ask students to provide an essay that details his or her purpose in seeking admission to the chosen field and/or institution. This essay should include personal strengths in the chosen field, plans for the future, and/or describe why applicants may be a good match for the institution given its specifics, such as values, philosophy, student body, etc. Be sure to take this task seriously as it is one of the most important parts of the application. Essays should be carefully organized and presented in a clear, well-written manner.

When required, the biographical essay helps admissions officers “get to know” the applicant. This is an essential part of the overall application. The essay should emphasize individual strengths, interests and goals. Approach the application in a personal manner and view the questions about honors, awards, work, travel and hobbies as a chance to help the admissions officer understand your background and personality. If any particular portion of the application is not relevant or applicable to your situation, note that on the form, along with some explanation. For example, many European schools have fewer school-sponsored activities than their American counterparts. Some schools do not present academic honors. These situations should be explained. Bear in mind that admissions officers want to know what you excel at, what you are interested in and what types of activities occupy your time outside of school. Overall, they want to know what you are like and how you are different from other applicants.

Many students tend to be too modest when asked to present their interests and accomplishments. Most candidates, in completing the application, will be describing themselves for the first time in their lives. All applicants should realize that their ability to persuasively explain their background, interests and assets will have a significant impact on their application for admission. Although each candidate is unique, the most successful candidates are those who can clearly articulate their personal strengths and their perceived match with a given institution.

If institutions request letters of recommendation, ask two or three people to write letters on your behalf. The university will specify the number of letters to be submitted. Try to select references who hold respected positions and who are familiar with you and your academic work or can testify to your personal strengths and accomplishments. Present or former teachers, professors or employers are possible choices. For recommendation letters to be effective, they should contain insights into your seriousness of purpose, academic promise, motivation, adaptability, personality and character. Statements about research ability, as well as preparation and promise in the specific field, are also necessary. Recommendations

which give an honest appraisal of your capabilities - weak points as well as strong points - are much more convincing to U.S. admissions officers (and therefore more valuable) than general letters of extreme praise.

These letters should be written in English, or accompanied by a translation. If a form is provided by the university, it must be used. To guarantee candor and confidentiality, it is essential that evaluations be mailed directly to the admissions officer of the particular institution, without having been read by the applicant. As a courtesy, give each person a stamped airmail envelope addressed to the institution. Write in the lower left hand corner of the envelope "Re: Application of (your name)."

Evidence of financial resources. Due to U.S. Immigration law, admissions officers cannot issue the certificates needed to request a visa for study in the United States until they are satisfied that an applicant has enough money, from whatever sources, to cover all expenses during the period of stay in the United States. Most institutions require applicants to submit financial forms or bank statements that list the amounts and sources of funds available to pay educational and living expenses in the U.S. Usually, this information must be confirmed or witnessed by a responsible individual, such as an officer of the bank where the applicant's funds are on deposit. If a sponsor or parent is contributing financial support, they will be asked to attest to the availability of funds. In some cases, notarization of these documents may be required.

NOTE: Follow all the application instructions very carefully. Completeness, neatness of the application not only provide a positive image of the applicant, it also minimizes mistakes and reduces possible delays in evaluation.

5. Summary of Effective Application Strategies

- Observe deadlines and apply to several institutions. Make sure the institutions you choose satisfy your personal preferences not only for academic study, but also for lifestyle, climate, geography, size of school, type of environment, and residential accommodation.
- Of the schools you apply to, no more than two should be highly selective institutions.
- At least two choices should be institutions whose admissions standards fit closely with your background, test scores and academic achievements.
- The remaining institutions should include at least one that will almost certainly grant admission.
- If you have selected a highly competitive field such as engineering or business, apply to a larger number of institutions. If financial assistance is needed, research alternative sources of financing.

You can judge your relative competitiveness from profile of last year's admitted class on the university's website.

6. Notification of Acceptance

From March through April, American universities send letters to students indicating whether they have been accepted or rejected. It is important to notify your chosen university of your intention to enroll, and to decline other admission offers. Typically the deadline for accepting

the admission offer is May 1.

Once an offer of admission is accepted, students are usually asked to pay a tuition or admission deposit of \$100-\$500. At the same time, be sure to contact the university Housing Office to reserve a campus apartment or residence hall room. Housing is in short supply on many American campuses and is assigned on a first-come-first-serve basis. If you desire or are required to stay in university housing, paying a housing deposit (\$100 - \$400) may also be necessary.

ADMISSION TESTS

Admissions tests help American universities judge the ability of a student to successfully complete a university program. These exams are intended to evaluate acquired knowledge, as well as aptitude for further study in a particular field. The tests are necessary in the United States because "acquired knowledge" is not regulated by the government, and varies from state to state and even from school to school.

All international students whose native language is not English are required to take an English Language Proficiency exam (see numbers 4 and 5 below) in addition to other required admission tests. Since American universities attach more importance to the results achieved on these particular tests than to any other guarantee of knowledge of English, students wishing to enter an American university are strongly advised to take an English Language Proficiency test in October or November (a year before they plan to go to the United States) and to have test results available early for American universities. It is recommended that you apply to take these tests very early on in your application process as the test dates and seats available are limited.

ACT/SAT Requirements

Many US institutions require that all applicants (whether international or domestic) submit scores of either the ACT Test or the SAT Reasoning Test. These colleges typically let the applicant decide which exam (ACT or SAT) to take. International students must arrange to take the test in the last year of their secondary studies. Some of the more selective universities will also require applicants to submit SAT Subject Tests or the ACT Plus Writing.

1. American College Testing (ACT) Program

The ACT (American College Test) is accepted by every US institution that uses standardized tests as part of the undergraduate admission process. It is a multiple-choice test that measures student abilities in the core curricular areas of English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning, and also has an optional Writing test for students applying to colleges or universities that require or recommend a writing score. It takes approximately three and a half hours to complete the ACT, plus another 30 minutes for students taking the optional Writing. The ACT is scored from 1-36 for the four individual multiple-choice sections as well as the overall "Composite" score. The Writing section is scored on a scale of 2-12,

and does not affect the Composite score.

Since the ACT is based on the specific courses that students are already taking in school, students tend to feel comfortable with the material on the test. Also, since the ACT is a curriculum test, it can be used to satisfy Subject Test requirements of most universities. Registration details and test preparation information for the ACT can be found at www.actstudent.org. The ACT test is offered five times per year (October, December, February, April, and June) at both the International School of Brussels and at the Antwerp International School. It is advisable to take the test as early as possible so that test results can reach the university admissions officers before the application deadlines.

More competitive universities will require ACT with the writing test. Note that the Writing test is not offered internationally in February, so plan on taking it in October, December, April, or June if you are applying to universities that require writing.

2. Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT Reasoning Test)

The SAT Reasoning Test is administered by the College Board, a private organization based in the United States. As with the ACT, the SAT Reasoning Test is also accepted by virtually every institution that uses standardized tests for undergraduate admission purposes. It is offered six times per year in Brussels (October, November, December, January, May and June). It is advisable to take the test as early as possible so that test results can reach the university admissions officers before the application deadlines.

The SAT Reasoning Test is primarily a multiple choice exam that assesses whether students possess the necessary verbal and quantitative skills to succeed in university-level studies. It takes approximately four hours and consists of ten sections on English grammar, reading, vocabulary and mathematics. There are sub-scores for each section and scaled scores (ranging from 200 to 800) for the verbal and mathematical sections.

3. SAT Subject Tests

The SAT Subject Tests (also known as SAT II) are more specialized and enable colleges to judge a student's preparedness for specific courses. Each SAT subject test is one hour long and the following tests are available: Literature, United States History, World History, Mathematics Level I & Mathematics level II, Biology E/M, Chemistry, Physics, Chinese with Listening, French and French with Listening, German and German with Listening, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Japanese with Listening, Korean with Listening, Latin, Spanish and Spanish with Listening. Because Europeans are stronger in languages and science, we recommend that students take one or several Subject Tests. This can enhance the candidate's application. Always check the requirements of each university in order to register for the appropriate SAT test(s).

Complete information, descriptions and application forms for these tests are available in the Commission's Advising Center or directly from the SAT Central Administration: www.collegeboard.com.

Our site has new information on the differences between exams (ACT vs. SAT; ACT Plus Writing vs. SAT Subject Tests, etc.) and choosing the one that's the best fit.

4. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

The TOEFL is widely accepted by educational institutions in the USA. In Belgium, it is administered at two locations in Brussels as an internet-based test (IBT). Once registered, all information on the place and time will be sent by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Students can register by mail with a TOEFL bulletin, by telephone (+31 320 239 540) or on-line at www.toefl.org. Scores are valid for two years only.

The TOEFL tests all four language skills and has four sections:

- Listening: ability to understand English as it is spoken in North America.
- Speaking: ability to speak with confidence both in and outside of the classroom.
- Reading: ability to understand non-technical reading material.
- Writing: ability to write in English on an assigned topic.

Complete information, descriptions and application forms for TOEFL are available in the Commission's Advising Center or directly from www.toefl.org.

5. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

IELTS (www.ielts.org) is a language test that is jointly managed by the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), the British Council and IDP:IELTS Australia. It is recognized by some educational institutions in the USA as alternative to TOEFL.

IELTS is available in two formats: Academic or General Training. Academic Training tests the ability to study or train in English at an undergraduate or postgraduate level.

The General Training Module tests basic survival skills in a broad social and educational context in English. This test is used for high school students going on exchanges in English-speaking countries and/or for immigration purposes.

IELTS covers all four language skills and has four sections :

- Listening : ability to understand a recorded text in English.
- Reading : ability to read and understand texts from books, magazines, journals and newspapers in English.
- Writing : ability to write a description in English based on material given as well as to write a short essay in response to a statement or question.
- Speaking : ability to express oneself in English and engage in a discussion of abstract issues.

Complete information, descriptions and application forms for IELTS are available in the Commission's Advising Center or directly from www.britishcouncil.be .

The Commission owns several TOEFL and IELTS preparation guides, which can be studied in the Advising Center or borrowed in exchange for a deposit (refunded when the book is returned).

NOTE: The most important thing to remember about an admission test is that it is just one element of your application. Admissions officers will consider an applicant's test results in combination with academic records, personal statements and letters of recommendation. In addition, admissions officers usually realize that international students often submit lower verbal scores than American students (due to language differences). International students' mathematics scores, however, are usually comparable to American scores.

In addition to the resources available in the Commission's Advising Center, the following book stores also carry test preparation books for the TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, and ACT:

- www.amazon.com (overseas shipping rates apply)
- www.amazon.co.uk or www.amazon.fr

- Sterling Books, Fossé aux Loups, 38, Wolvengracht, B-1000 Brussels.
Tel: 02/223.62.23
- Waterstone's Books, Boulevard Adolphe Maxlaan 71-75, B-1000 Brussels.
Tel: 02/219.27.08

FINANICAL AID & EMPLOYMENT

1. Financial Aid

Financial aid for international students in the United States is extremely limited. In fact, approximately 70% of all international students are supported by private funds. The remaining 30% are funded by home country governments and organizations, U.S. government agencies and U.S. colleges and universities. Of that 30%, only 10% of students receive funds from U.S. colleges and universities.

Despite the sharp competition for funds, financial aid is sometimes available from public and private educational institutions, private foundations, civic organizations and private companies. In most cases, international students compete with American students for financial aid funds. International students should therefore explore all opportunities for funding *in their own countries* before applying for U.S. based aid.

There are eight general types of financial aid in the United States: administrative assistantships, fellowships, grants, loans, research assistantships, scholarships, teaching assistantships and work-study programs. Please note that most assistantship forms of aid are reserved for graduate level students.

Administrative assistantships are rare and are based on student need and academic qualifications. These assistantships usually require 10 to 20 hours of work within the administrative offices of the university and may provide a tuition waiver or modest salary.

Fellowships are typically based on academic merit and carry no teaching or research obligations. Fellowships usually cover tuition plus a cash stipend.

Grants are often based on financial need and academic merit and do not carry work or research obligations. The Commission for Educational Exchange administers the Fulbright Grant Program for citizens of Belgium. Grants are available for graduate level studies and post-doctoral research and lecturing. Candidates must demonstrate academic excellence as well as a strong knowledge of English. A more detailed hand-out about Fulbright grant opportunities is available at the Commission.

Loans are a common form of financial aid for American students. Loans provided by the U.S. government are for U.S. citizens and permanent residents only and require students to re-pay the loans after graduation at a fixed interest rate. Loans from non-government sources such as private banks may be available to international students, but will require a co-signor who must be either a U.S. citizen or permanent resident of the USA.

Research assistantships (RAs) are based on academic qualifications and research interests. The student assists a faculty member in conducting research and is usually compensated with a tuition waiver and modest salary or stipend. Again, RA positions are generally reserved for advanced masters or doctoral students.

Scholarships are funds given by the institution (or other sponsor, corporate, for example) that require no repayment. There are two kinds of scholarships – need-based and merit-based.

Need-based scholarships cover students in full amount for the difference between the cost of attendance and what they can realistically pay. They are unrelated to students' past academic performance or academic promise. The amount of the scholarship may differ from year to year, as students' ability to pay changes. There are only a few (about 50) institutions in the US that offer such scholarships.

Merit-based scholarships are awarded for outstanding academic achievements. Depending on the sponsor, scholarships may cover partial or full tuition or attendance costs. Some universities may offer scholarships to athletes who will represent them in inter-collegiate competitions. These scholarships are administered by the Athletics departments and team coaches directly. Typically an athlete must be recruited by the university team to have a realistic chance for an athletic scholarship.

Teaching Assistantships (TAs) are based on academic qualifications. TAs usually require a student to work 15 to 20 hours per week in such areas as lecturing, grading papers, supervising laboratory classes, etc. Students usually receive a tuition waiver and a modest salary or stipend. TA positions are often reserved for advanced level students (some master's work completed or doctoral level studies).

Work-study programs provide jobs for students with financial need. The program encourages community service work or work related to each student's course of study. Most work-study opportunities are subsidized by the U.S. government and are often limited to American students.

Institutions offering on-campus housing may also offer students positions of Residential Advisors (RA.) RA's are responsible for overseeing an assigned part of the dormitory. RA's are compensated by having free housing accommodation, and may also receive a small stipend.

Students who are interested in obtaining financial assistance from American institutions must request specific applications for financial aid. Students should direct their inquiries to the university's Office of International Admissions or Office of International Student Services. At some institutions, applications for financial aid must be submitted *earlier* than the regular admission deadline.

On the special forms provided in the application materials, give complete and accurate information about amounts and sources of funds available for study in the United States. Also give an estimate of the amount of aid needed to meet all expenses. Do not understate the amount of funds needed with the expectation of finding financial aid at a later date. Opportunities for financial aid (including employment) are severely limited once international students arrive in the United States. Applicants for financial assistance may have to take additional tests, provide additional proof of eligibility for aid, obtain additional recommendations and sometimes meet an earlier application deadline.

In general, international students will have a greater chance of obtaining financial assistance if they have:

- evidence of high academic achievement ;
- high standardized test scores (ACT, SAT, TOEFL, IELTS, etc.) ;
- demonstrable financial need but private funding to cover some of the cost. Financial need is not as crucial for some awards at the undergraduate level.

2. Employment

International students should not rely on earning money in the United States to pay for their higher education. American visas require international students to study full-time and limit employment to supervised work that is directly connected to their field of study and conducted on the premises of the university. Some international students may be permitted to work part-time on campus after their first year of study, but the amount of money earned is only enough for pocket money or miscellaneous expenses. It is not possible to cover living expenses with the part-time salaries earned on campus.

You can work 20 hours per week on campus during term, full time during holidays, from the start of your degree.

Some institutions may offer students an option for a curricular practical training (CPT) as part of their academic preparation. Such option may be known as **cooperative education** programs (co-op.) Co-op provides students with the opportunity to practice the skills and knowledge, gained in the classroom, in a professional environment related to their major. Under the CPT regulations, international students are allowed to work full-time outside of their institution and earn appropriate wages. The length of employment is governed by the institution's established curriculum. Although the earning potential of co-op employment is greater than that of part-time on-campus employment, it is not enough to cover the full cost of attendance.

AMERICAN VISAS

In order to begin the visa application procedure at the United States Embassy, all students must be admitted to an accredited U.S. university and they must have the proper SEVIS (see Commonly Used Immigration Terms, pg. 32) documents given by the university. A valid passport and U.S. visa, as well as visa-supporting documents, is needed to enter the United States. Students and scholars generally fall under the Non-Immigrant classifications of "Exchange-Visitor" (type J) or "Student" (type F). The possibility for employment is governed by the type of visa issued. Under no circumstances is it possible to cover all educational expenses by working in the United States during your studies. Information concerning U.S. visas and the application procedure is available from:

The Consular Section of the United States Embassy

Boulevard du Régent 25 Regentlaan
B- 1000 Brussels
Belgium

<http://belgium.usembassy.gov/visas2.html>

COMMONLY USED TERMS IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION

A.A.: Associate of Arts degree, awarded upon completion of a two-year liberal arts program.

A.A.S.: Associate of Applied Science degree awarded upon completion of a two-year program, generally in a commercial or technical field of study.

A.S.: Associate of Science degree awarded upon completion of a two-year liberal arts program.

Academic Adviser: Member of the faculty who helps and advises the student on academic matters. He or she also assists the student with course selection and registration processes, and provides with basic support related to academic matters.

Academic Probation: A status resulting from unsatisfactory academic work; a warning that the student must improve academic performance or be dismissed after a specific period of time.

Academic Year: Period of instruction from the beginning of the school year in September to the end in May; usually divided into two semesters, or three quarters, or three trimesters.

Accreditation: Education in the U.S. is not controlled by a national ministry. An educational institution is accredited by meeting the standards set by a particular association. Colleges and universities may be accredited by 6 regional and/or 37 professional accrediting bodies. Examples: Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, American Medical

Association.

Add Card: A printed card, usually computerized, authorizing a student to add a course to his or her schedule before a certain deadline.

Admission - Advanced Standing: Admission to a college or university as a sophomore, junior or senior based on credit received at another college or university.

Admission - Conditional: Admission granted to students who do not meet all admission criteria; the student may be required to take remedial courses or pass placement exams to demonstrate acceptable level of preparedness for full academic work..

Admission - Freshman Standing: Admission to a college or university based on graduation from an approved secondary school (high school).

Admission - Open: College or university admissions policy of admitting high school graduates and other adults without regard to conventional academic qualifications, such as high school subjects, high school grades and admission test scores. Virtually all applicants are accepted.

Admission - Rolling: Admission decisions are made and released to students immediately upon completion of the application evaluation process, and not on a specific date. Rolling admissions programs do not follow the usual deadlines for applications and often admit students for the next available term.

Admission - Special Standing: Admission to a college or university based on individual consideration of the applicant's age, scores on aptitude tests and other qualitative factors; usually involves applicants who do not meet regular admission requirements.

Advance Admission (Tuition) Deposit: Money sent to an institution with your letter of acceptance of their offer of admission.

Advance Registration: Selection of classes one term in advance.

Advisee: A student receiving advice, information and assistance in planning and carrying out his or her educational plans.

Adviser: A member of the college or university staff who is assigned to assist students with educational planning.

Affirmative Action Program: A primary objective of affirmative action programs is to increase the participation of under-represented and disadvantaged students (including minorities and women) in higher education. Affirmative action programs generally review the applicant's file in a more holistic manner and pay special attention to non-traditional indicators of academic promise such as community service, leadership or educational hardship. The program works with other academic and student service units to provide admitted students with the necessary support for a beneficial educational experience.

Alumnus: A person who has attended or graduated from a school, college or university.

Assignment: Out-of-class work or "homework" required by a professor, due by a specific date.

Assistantship: A position in teaching, administration or research; usually for graduate

students; involves 10 to 20 hours of work per week and graduate study.

Audit: Permits a student to take a class without receiving a grade or any credit. Requirements are usually the same as those for credit status. Fees for auditing classes may be lower than those for attending classes for credit.

B.A.: Bachelor of Arts degree awarded upon completion of a four year program of study; generally includes study of a foreign language.

B.S.: Bachelor of Science degree awarded upon completion of a four year program of study; generally does not include study of a foreign language.

Blue Book: A small booklet with a blue cover and blank, ruled pages, used for writing essay-type examinations; usually purchased by the student at the university book store.

Bulletin: Same as Catalog.

Bursar: The University Cashier.

Cafeteria: Self-service eating facility operated by the school or privately; school cafeterias offer meals at lower costs than at restaurants.

Campus: The land on which the buildings of a college or university are located.

Candidate: The term used to identify advanced doctoral students who have successfully completed the qualifying exams and coursework for their doctoral degree program. Doctoral students must usually achieve "candidacy" to form their dissertation committees, commence the research phase of their program or be eligible for certain types of financial aid.

Carrell: A small enclosed desk in the library reserved by individuals doing research.

Cashier: Office or person within the university administration that collects tuition and fees.

Catalog: The publication issued annually or biannually which gives information about a given school; basic publication and general reference; sometimes called the "Calendar", "Register" or "Bulletin." Some catalogs may contain descriptions of academic offerings and individual courses.

Certificate: An award for successfully completing a specified program of study, generally one or two years in length.

Check (Personal Check): Convenient and safe way of banking and managing your finances; there probably is a bank located near your school and you should be able to open a checking account with a minimal initial deposit; you will be able to pay most of your bills by check so that you will not have to carry around large sums of cash.

Class: Referring to the year of study; 1st year Freshman, 2nd year Sophomore, 3rd year Junior, 4th year Senior; also refers to a group of people who meet with a professor on a scheduled basis.

Class Card: An official card, usually computerized, authorizing entry into a particular class.

Class Rank: A number or ratio indicating a student's academic standing in his or her graduating class. A student who ranks first in a class of 100 students would report his or her

class rank as 1/100, while a student ranking last would report 100/100. Class rank may also be expressed in percentiles, i.e., the top 25 percent, the lower 50 percent.

College: Undergraduate, bachelor degree programs (4 or 5 years) in liberal arts, sciences and first professional degrees; may be an independent college or part of a university.

Community College: Generally a public, two-year institution of higher learning that offers instruction to meet the needs of the surrounding community.

Consortium: When there are several colleges and universities within close proximity of each other, they often join together to form a consortium. The advantages of attending a consortium-member college includes access to more resources and libraries, opportunities to take courses at all member institutions and a greater selection of cultural and social programs.

Continuing Education: An extension of study at the higher education level for post high school or college students.

Co-op: A store operated by students with the cooperation and approval of the school; sells books, school supplies, computer equipment and other items useful to students at low cost. Sometimes there are also food co-ops, which are student-operated supermarkets.

Cooperative Education: A work/study program in which the student works full-time during one term of the school year to obtain practical experience in his or her field. Depending on the number of cooperative education periods, students may need more than four years to complete an undergraduate program.

Core Curriculum: A group of courses in varied subject areas, designated by a college as requirements for a specified degree. Same as Required Courses.

Course: Usually refers to a specific class, e.g. Physical Chemistry I.

Course Load: The number of courses for which a student registers in one school term.

Course Number: The number given to identify a course, e.g. (Chem. 236) Physical Chemistry I. Numbers of 100-300 usually refer to undergraduate courses and numbers above 400 are usually graduate courses.

Course Pack: A packet of photocopied materials required for a course. The professor selects articles, essays or book chapters and asks a campus printing shop to make copies for the students. The prices of course packs usually include printing fees and copyright fees.

Cram: To study intensely for a test at the last possible moment; generally an ineffective way to study.

Credit: The quantitative value assigned to a course; the recognition given for successful completion of course work; usually defined by the number of hours spent in class per week; one credit hour is usually assigned for 50 minutes of class per week over a period of a semester, quarter or trimester.

Cut: To “skip” or not attend a class session. Attendance is usually required at all class sessions in the United States.

Dean: Senior academic and administrative officer of a college or school. A university may

have several colleges, each headed by a Dean.

Dean's List: List of full-time undergraduate students who have earned honor-level grade point averages for a given term.

Deferred Tuition Payment Plan: A plan for paying college expenses such as tuition, and room and board, over a period of time instead of in one payment.

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

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

Discussion Group: A group that meets with a professor or teaching assistant to discuss lectures presented by the professor. Attendance is usually required to receive credit for the course.

Dismissal: Involuntary separation of the student from the college; student is asked to leave temporarily or permanently by the college, usually because of unsatisfactory grades, sometimes because of undesirable conduct.

Dissertation: A formal paper (or thesis) presenting the results of original research, which is submitted to fulfill requirements for a doctoral degree.

Domicile: Legal residence or permanent address.

Dormitory (Dorm): Living facilities which are operated by the school or privately; rooms, toilet and bathroom available; usually no cooking allowed.

Drop or Add: To withdraw from a course or add a course before a specified date.

Drop Card: Printed card, usually computerized, which authorizes a student to withdraw from a course without penalty if filed by a specific date.

Dropout: A student who leaves school with no intention of returning.

Drug Store: A store that has a druggist (pharmacist) who will fill physician's (doctor's) prescriptions for medicine. It also sells non-prescription drugs (e.g. aspirin); medical supplies (band-aids, bandages, thermometers) as well as notebooks, pencils, candies, cigarettes, razors, shaving cream, cosmetics, magazines and greeting cards.

Dry Cleaners: A shop where you can take your clothes to be dry cleaned and pressed.

Electives: Usually refers to courses that students choose out of personal interest or to fulfill general credit requirements. The opposite of "required courses."

English as a Second Language (ESL): English language training for persons whose first language is not English. Also referred to as EFL, English as a Foreign Language.

Evening College: A division of a college designed for adults, to provide college studies on a part-time basis.

Extracurricular Activities: Activities that are a part of student life, but not part of regular classroom study, such as athletics, student activities, dances, clubs, etc.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA): This legislation protects the privacy of university students' academic records. Information about students' academic results will not be released to anyone except the student, unless express written permission is granted by the student. This means that parents may not access grading information about their children unless they have the student's permission.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA): As a result of state and federal legislation, a public record prepared, used, owned, possessed or retained by a university must be made available for inspection and/or copying upon presentation of a written request. This means, for example, that students may request to view their university records or letters of recommendation unless they have previously waived this legal right.

Fee: A payment charged for special services. Examples: application fee, graduation fee, late registration fee or student activities fee.

Fellowship: A gift of money to a student, usually for graduate study; provides for tuition, educational and living expenses for full-time study.

Final: Terminal examination in a class or course.

Financial Aid: Scholarships, loans, grants-in-aid, and other financial assistance for students.

Fraternity: A social organization of men living together in a large house, each with different rules, regulations and objectives.

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

Full-time Student: A student who is carrying a normal load of courses. International students holding a F-1 visa must be full-time students. In general, undergraduate students must take at least 12 credit hours per semester and graduate students at least 9.

Grade Point Average (GPA): A system used by many colleges for evaluating the overall scholastic performance of students. It is found by first determining the number of grade points a student has earned in each course completed and then by dividing the sum of all grade points by the number of points or hours of course work carried. Grade points for a course are found by multiplying the number of points or hours given for the course by the student's grade in the course. The most common system of numerical valued for grades is A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, and E or F=0. See page 5 for an example.

Grading System: Schools, colleges and universities in the United States commonly use letter grades to indicate the quality of a student's academic performance: A (excellent), B (good), C (average), D (below average), and F (failing). Work rated C or above is usually required of an undergraduate student to continue his/her studies; work rated B or higher is usually required of a graduate student to continue. Grades of P (pass), S (satisfactory), and N (no credit) are also used. In percentage scales, 100 percent is the highest mark, and 70 percent (or 65 percent) is usually the lowest passing mark.

Graduate: A student who has completed a course of study, either at the high school or

college level. A graduate program at a university is a study course for students who hold a Bachelor's degree.

Graduate Assistant: See Assistantship.

Grants-in-Aid: A gift of financial aid which does not take into account academic excellence.

Greek System: A system of social and/or professional student organizations that offer social, philanthropic and academic opportunities to its members. An institution's Greek system is usually comprised of a number of fraternities (for men) and sororities (for women). Many professional fraternities (such as engineering or business fraternities) are open to both men and women.

Honor Fraternities: Greek letter organizations honoring students (both men and women) who have achieved distinction in academic areas or community or professional service.

I.D. (Identification) Card: A card that verifies a student's enrollment in a particular institution. The I.D. card usually includes the student's full name, university identification number and a micro-chip that holds student information and/or cash (similar to a Proton chip). The I.D. card is useful both on and off campus, e.g. cashing personal checks, gaining entrance to university facilities or checking out library materials. This card is usually issued during the registration period.

Incomplete Grade: A grade given due to a reasonable delay in the completion of work for a particular course. Another grade is recorded when the work is completed.

Independent Study: A method of receiving credit for study or research independent of the assignments of any specific course. Such study is often part of an honors program in the student's major and is supervised by a specified professor.

International Student Advisor (ISA): The person associated with a school, college or university who is in charge of providing information and guidance to international students in such areas as U.S. government regulations, student visas, academic regulations, social customs, language, financial or housing problems, travel plans, insurance and certain legal matters.

International Student Office (ISO): The office within a college or university that is responsible for providing support and guidance to all international students and scholars on campus. The ISO often organizes orientation programs and social activities for students and families. The ISO also maintains the university's compliance with Department of Homeland Security regulations, submits student information to SEVIS and serves as the primary source of advice regarding immigration and visa status.

Junior: A third year student at a high school, college or university.

Junior College (JC): A two-year college of higher education in liberal arts, sciences, technical and vocational training, either under public or private control; A.A. or A.S. degree awarded after two years study, or certificate after a shorter course of study.

Laundromat: A place where students can use automatic washing machines, dryers and dry cleaning machines; used by inserting a coin. Users must provide their own laundry soap, bleach, etc. Laundromats are less expensive than a full-service laundry.

Leave of Absence: Permission for a student in good standing to take leave and then return

to continue his or her studies.

Lecture: The most common method of instruction in colleges and universities, often supplemented with small group discussions led by teaching assistants.

Liberal Arts College: A college that emphasizes a program of general undergraduate studies comprised mainly of courses in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences.

Loan: Any advance of financial credit or funds to students, which enables them to continue their education. Repayment is required, either in the form of service or in cash, after the student leaves the institution.

Lower Division: The freshman and sophomore levels; the first and second years of an undergraduate program of study.

M.A./M.S.: Master of Arts/Master of Science degrees awarded upon completion of a 1 or 2 year post-university program.

Major Field of Study (Major): A student's primary field of study.

Matriculated: Enrolled for study in a particular degree program in a college or university.

Mid-Term: Examination given in the middle of a semester or a quarter.

Minor Field of Study (Minor): A student's secondary field of study.

Multiple-Choice Exam: Examination in which questions are followed by two or more answers from which the correct answer must be selected.

Non-Matriculated: A student at a college or university who is taking classes but is not enrolled in a specific degree program. Also called a non-degree student.

Nonresident: Students who do not meet the residence requirements of the state or city that has a public college or university. Tuition fees and admissions policies may differ for residents and nonresidents. International students are usually classified as nonresidents, and there is little possibility of changing to resident status at a later date for fee purposes. Most publicly-supported institutions will not permit an international student to be classified as a resident student while on a student visa.

Open-Book Exam: Examination in which you are permitted to use your textbook(s) during the test.

Open-Door Admissions: Admission granted to all applicants.

Oral Exam: Examination in which the professor asks students questions that must be answered by speaking rather than by writing.

Part-Time Employment: Employment up to 20 hours per week. Part-time work is not permitted unless a student has successfully completed one year of study; on-campus employment requires the written approval of the International Student Adviser; off-campus employment requires the written approval of Citizenship and Information Services.

Part-Time Student: A student who carries less than a full-time course load.

Pass-Fail Grading System: The practice of rating a student's performance in their courses

as either passing or failing instead of giving grades to indicate various levels of quality.

Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy; highest academic degree in American education; diploma states Doctor of Philosophy in (subject); generally research-oriented.

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

Point: Used interchangeably with "credit" and "unit"; also referring to the grading system: 4 points=A, 3 points=B, 2 points=C, 1 point=D, 0 point=F.

Prelims: Short for "preliminary examinations": the qualifying examinations given by a committee of professors to determine whether a student may become a candidate for a doctoral degree. The prelims evaluate the student's knowledge in the field in which the doctoral research will concentrate. Prelims may be written, oral or both.

Prerequisites: Programs or courses that a student is required to complete before enrolling in more advanced programs or courses.

Probation: See "Academic Probation."

Professor Emeritus: An academic title generally awarded to retired faculty.

Professional School: Institutions for the study of business, medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, music, art or theology; 2 to 7 years of training; may be independent or part of a university.

Quarter: Usually 11 weeks of classes including the final examination period; summer quarter is sometimes subdivided into shorter periods of study.

Quiz: A short test that may or may not be announced ahead of time ("Pop Quiz").

Readmission: Approval of the enrollment or admission of a former student.

Registrar: College administrator who maintains student academic records and manages course registration and schedules for the institution.

Registration: The procedure for selecting and enrolling in a specific set of courses each term. Students typically receive a "registration appointment" prior to the start of the term, which gives them a specific date for accessing the institution's registration system. The appointment is based on the number of past courses that the student has completed. More senior students generally receive earlier registration appointments and have a better selection of open courses. Because there are limited spaces for most courses, it is important that students register as soon as their appointment allows. Course registration is usually completed on-line or via touch tone telephone. Newly arriving international students often receive assistance with their initial registration once they reach campus.

Remedial Course: A non-credit course to help the student with a weak background in a particular area prepare for a credit course in that area.

Remedial English: English language study for persons with certain deficiencies; e.g. writing or speech.

Required Courses: Subjects that are chosen for students and must be completed with a passing grade in order to obtain a degree.

Research Paper: A written report that includes research findings and the development of the student's own ideas.

Residence Hall: A newer term for dormitories. Residence halls offer social opportunities and support services for students and often incorporate special "learning communities" or study groups.

Savings Account: An account with a bank for savings for which interest is paid.

Scholarship: Any grant, fellowship, or remission of tuition and fees that enables a student to continue his or her studies.

Second-Hand Bookstore: Often operated by the student government, school organization or private group, these stores offer used textbooks at prices 20% to 75% lower than at a normal bookstore.

Semester: Usually 15 to 16 weeks of classes including the final examination period. Typical semester calendar: two semesters (September - June) and a summer session (June - August).

Seminar: A form of small group instruction combining independent research and class discussion under the guidance of a professor.

Senior: A fourth year student at a high school, college or university.

Sign-Up Sheet: Informal way of registering for an activity; usually asks for name and contact details.

Social Security Number (SSN): A nine digit number used by the U.S. Social Security Administration; commonly used by colleges and universities as an identification number for registration. A Social Security number may be obtained at the Social Security office without fee by any person, whether or not he or she is a U.S. citizen. Anyone who works regularly in the United States must obtain a Social Security Number.

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

Sorority: Comparable to a fraternity, except that it is for women.

Special Student: A student at a college or university who is not enrolled in a specific degree program. Same as a non-degree student.

Stipend: The amount of money given to a student (per month or per term) as part of a scholarship or fellowship package.

Study Skills: Skills that help students study more effectively and efficiently; includes time management, note-taking skills, organizational skills, memorization techniques and effective reading approaches.

Survey Course: A course that provides an overview of a particular field of knowledge (e.g. Art History 101: Survey of Ancient to Medieval Art.)

Syllabus: An outline of topics and required readings to be covered in a specific course. Usually provided by the professor at the beginning of each course.

Take-Home Exam: Examination which may be written at home.

Teaching Assistant (T.A.): A person, usually an advanced graduate student, who assists a professor with teaching, laboratory supervision or research.

Tenure: A system of promotion for professors in the U.S. higher education system. College and university faculty members who produce strong academic work and meet set institutional requirements are awarded tenure. Tenure typically guarantees a higher level of academic freedom, protecting the professor from being terminated for controversial work, opinions or research. The average amount of time required to earn tenure is 5-8 years.

Term: A division of the school year calendar.

Thesaurus: Similar to a dictionary; provides synonyms (words with similar meanings) that can be substituted for various words. A thesaurus is helpful for avoiding repetition when writing.

Thesis: A formal paper presenting the results of study and research that is submitted to fulfill requirements for an advanced degree; usually refers to the Master's thesis.

Transcript: A certified copy of a student's educational record containing titles of courses, the number of credits and the final grades in each course. An official transcript will also state the date that a degree has been conferred.

Transfer: A change in matriculation from one educational institution to another.

Trimester: Usually 16 weeks of classes including the final examination period; 3 trimesters (September - June) per academic year, with students generally attending two of the three.

True-False Exam: Examination in which statements are given and the student must answer by marking "True" or "False."

Undergraduate: A student enrolled in a program leading to the bachelor's degree.

Unit: Used interchangeably with credit or credit hour.

University: An institution composed of colleges or schools of liberal arts, sciences, technology and professional and graduate schools; bachelor degree programs (4 years), and technical and professional graduate training (2 to 5 years).

University Extension: Adult higher education programs offered by a university such as correspondence courses, discussion groups and conferences.

Upper Division: The junior and senior levels, or the third, fourth, and/or fifth years of a baccalaureate program of studies.

Withdrawal: A release from enrollment. When a student notifies the school that he or she will no longer attend classes, an "Official Withdrawal" (with university approval) is noted on the student's record. If a student does not notify the school, an "Unofficial Withdrawal" will be noted on the student's record.

Work-Study: Programs that provide jobs for students with financial need. The program encourages community service work or work related to each student's course of study. Work-study can also refer to cooperative education programs.

Zip Code: Postal code.

COMMONLY USED IMMIGRATION TERMS

Academic Training – An employment option for students/scholars on a J-1 visa, usually pursued after courses are completed. Academic training must be directly related to the student's field of study in the United States and must be approved by the school's Responsible Officer (RO).

Alien: For U.S. immigration purposes, an alien is anyone who does not hold U.S. citizenship or nationality. Aliens are further classified as "immigrants", "non-immigrants" or "special status" (such as political refugees).

Alien Registration Number: The number used by CIS to identify individuals who enter the United States on various visa types. For an F-1 or J-1 visa holder, this number is listed on the form I-94.

Arrival/Departure Record (Form I-94): This document, a small white card, verifies that a student/scholar has legally entered the United States. See also: Form I-94.

Certificate of Compliance: An Internal Revenue Service (IRS) document issued to departing foreign nationals as evidence that all owed income taxes have been paid. Also called an "Exit Visa" or "Sailing Permit."

Certificate of Eligibility: The forms I-20 A-B, I-20 M-N or DS-2019, issued by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Change of Status: Change from one visa classification to another. Change of status requires approval from the Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS): Formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the United States. The CIS is a division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

Curricular Practical Training (CPT): An employment option for F-1 students, usually an internship or a practicum linked to the major field of study. Curricular practical training must take place before the course of study is completed and must be approved by a Designated School Official (DSO).

Department of Homeland Security (DHS): The U.S. government agency that oversees Citizenship and Immigration Services and regulates the flow of foreign nationals (including students and scholars) across U.S. borders.

Deportation: Forced removal of a foreign national who has been judged to have illegally entered the United States or whose presence is considered to be against the public welfare.

Designated School Official (DSO): The school official who is authorized to issue I-20 forms, endorse forms for travel, authorize benefits related to F-1 status and update SEVIS records. This person is often the International Student Adviser.

Duration of Status (D/S): The authorized length of stay in the United States, which corresponds to the length of time required to complete a course of study (Point 5 on the Form I-20 and Point 3 on the Form DS-2019). Upon entering the United States, an immigration official will mark the I-94 card with “D/S” and the corresponding date.

Employment: Any type of work done in exchange for money, tuition, fees, books, supplies, room or other benefits. Work without any form of compensation is referred to as “volunteer work.” To protect jobs for U.S. citizens, employment of international students and Exchange Visitors and their spouses is restricted and regulated.

Exchange Visitor: A foreign national who enters the U.S. on a J-1 visa for educational purposes.

Exit Visa: See "Certificate of Compliance."

Extension of Stay: Permission from the CIS to remain in the U.S. beyond the expiration date specified on the Form I-94, Arrival/Departure Record.

F-1: U.S. visa classification that refers to a non-immigrant student who is pursuing a full course of study in the United States. F-1 visa holders are expected to return to their home countries after completing their studies.

F-2: U.S. visa classification that applies to the dependents (i.e., spouses and unmarried children) of F-1 visa holders.

International Student Office (ISO): The office within a college or university that is responsible for providing support and guidance to all international students and scholars on campus. The ISO often organizes orientation programs and social activities for students and families. The ISO also maintains the university’s compliance with Department of Homeland Security regulations, submits student information to SEVIS and serves as the primary source of advice regarding immigration and visa status. Sometimes referred to as the “Office of International Student and Scholar Services”, “Office of International Education” or “International Programs Office.”

Dependent: A person who relies on the visa-holder for support. For CIS purposes, a dependent is usually a spouse or an unmarried child.

Form DS-2019: The certificate of eligibility (or entry document) issued by a U.S. educational institution, which verifies that a particular student is eligible for a J-1 visa. The “Travel validation” on page 1 must be signed by a designated school official each time a student/scholar plans to travel and re-enter the United States. (Formerly the Form IAP-66.)

Form I-20 A-B: The certificate of eligibility (or entry document) issued by a U.S. educational institution, which verifies that a particular student has been accepted for full-time study. Only institutions with authorization from the Department of Homeland Security may issue I-20 forms. The I-20 A-B is required for obtaining a F-1 student visa. The “Travel validation for re-entry” on page 3 must be signed by a designated school official each time a student plans to travel and re-enter the United States.

Form I-20 ID Copy: The gold-colored CIS document, issued to F-1 visa holders at the point of entry into the U.S., which records immigration information for the visa-holder.

Form I-20 M-N: The I-20 M-N is issued by an established U.S. vocational or other recognized nonacademic institution, which verifies that a particular student has been accepted for full-time study. The I-20 M-N is required for obtaining an M-1 student visa.

Form I-94 (or I-94 card): The white card that must be completed by F-1 and J-1 visa holders upon arrival in the U.S. (Cards are usually distributed during flights to the U.S.) The I-94 card must be marked by an immigration officer upon entry to the U.S. and will indicate the duration of stay in the U.S. The card should be stapled or secured inside the passport. See also: arrival/departure record.

Form I-538: Application form to be filled out by J-1 or F-1 visa holders who are requesting an extension of stay, approval of part-time employment or practical training or permission to transfer from one school to another.

Form IAP-66: See "Form DS-2019."

Full-time Student: A student who carries a full load of courses, usually a minimum of 12 credit hours for undergraduates and nine credit hours for graduate students. F-1 and J-1 students are required to maintain full-time student status every regular term of the academic year, except summer.

Grace Period: The period of time that students/scholars are allowed to legally stay in the United States after the expiration date on the DS-2019 (30 days) or I-20 (60 days). Students may use the grace period to travel or to take steps to change or extend their visa status. (For example, to enroll in graduate school or get permission to engage in professional training.) Employment is not permitted during this time. Travel outside the United States during the grace period is not recommended without a new visa.

Home Residence Requirement: A CIS requirement for certain J-1 Exchange Visitors that they return to their home countries for at least two years after completing their Exchange Visitor programs in the U.S. The home residence requirement must be met before individuals are eligible to return to the U.S. in certain visa categories.

Immigrant: A person who arrives in a new country with the intent of becoming a permanent resident or citizen.

INS: Abbreviation for the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service now known as Citizenship and Immigration Services (CIS).

J-1: U.S. visa classification for "Exchange Visitors," persons authorized to come to the U.S. for certain educational purposes.

J-2: U.S. visa classification for dependents (i.e., spouse and unmarried children) of J-1 visa holders.

Notarization: The certification of a document or statement by a public official (known in the U.S. as a notary public). Notarization verifies that a signature is authentic and true.

Naturalization: The process of becoming a citizen of another country.

Optional Practical Training (OPT): An employment option for F-1 students, which must be directly related to the student's major area of study. OPT is limited to 12 months and is usually pursued after studies are completed. OPT requires approval of the U.S. immigration authorities.

Part-time Employment: Paid employment of up to 20 hours a week. Not permitted for M-1 students. Not permitted for F-1 students unless the student has successfully completed one year of study and receives permission from CIS.

Part-time Student: A regularly-enrolled student who carries less than a full-time course load. (See "Full-time Student.") International students are not allowed to be part-time students and cannot fall below a full-time study load each regular term of the academic year.

Permanent Resident: A foreign national authorized to live and work in the U.S. for an indefinite period of time. Permanent residents do not have full citizenship rights.

Responsible Officer: School officials who are authorized to issue DS-2019 forms and update information related to J-1 visas. This person is often an International Student Adviser.

SEVIS: The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System is a web-based system for maintaining information on international students and exchange visitors in the United States. SEVIS is administered by a division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. All international students must register with their university's International Student Office and report any changes of address or enrollment for entry into the SEVIS system.

Sailing Permit: See "Certificate of Compliance."

Transfer: A change from one program, sponsor or institution to another. If a student or scholar requests a transfer to a different educational program, specific permission is required from CIS. If the transfer is from one institution to another to continue the same educational program, no permission is necessary. If an institutional transfer is considered, for whatever reason or purpose, the International Student Advisers of both institutions must be consulted.

US-VISIT – A U.S. Department of Homeland Security program that collects travel and personal information (such as fingerprints) from visitors entering or exiting the United States. Automated US-VISIT computer terminals are located in most major U.S. airports.

Visa: An endorsement, stamped into a passport by a proper authority of the issuing country. The visa verifies that the passport has been examined, that certain requirements for entry have been met and that the owner is permitted to proceed. The visa does not represent permission to enter the country; actual permission is granted at the point of entry.

TIMELINE FOR PREPARING TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

12 to 18 months before departure:

- Evaluate your reasons for wanting to study in the U.S., consider the following:
 - Motivation and objectives. Why the U.S. and not elsewhere?
 - Future plans, academic interests and employment goals.
 - English proficiency and academic ability.
 - Time required to earn an American degree.
 - Estimated cost of study and financial aid opportunities.

June-September:

- Select 5 to 10 universities on the bases of their programs, degrees offered, accreditation, level of selectivity, cost, location and size.

July-August:

- Find out which standardized tests are required for admission (TOEFL, ACT, SAT, etc.).
- Register to take the exams in October or November. Forms are available on-line or from the Commission.

August-September:

- Write to 5 to 10 universities to request application forms for admission and financial aid or download information from the institutional web sites.
- If you have specific questions about an institution's admissions procedures, send a letter of inquiry or email message to admissions staff well in advance of the application deadline.

October-February:

- Request official transcripts from your school or university and prepare English translations.
- Have the English translations and transcript copies certified at the Commission.
- Apply for financial aid in Belgium and the United States.
- Ask professors or other colleagues to prepare and send recommendation letters directly to the selected institutions.
- Send application forms and other application materials to universities well in advance of the application deadlines. Keep copies of all application forms for your records.

February-April:

- Wait for acceptance and rejection letters from the universities.

March-April:

- Contact the institutions from which you have not yet received a response to your admission applications.

April-June:

- Accept the offer of admission from your preferred university. (This can be done via email, telephone, fax or letter.)
- Decline offers from other universities.
- Contact the university's housing office to reserve university owned housing.
- Contact the university's International Student Adviser for any specific information concerning arrival and orientation.
- Contact the Commission for pre-departure information.

Upon Arrival in the United States:

- Contact the International Student Adviser and register your U.S. postal and email address with the university and SEVIS.

More information about awards, applications and higher education in the United States can be found at our Advising Center:

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