IF YOU WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

BOOK 2

GRADUATE AND PROFESSIONAL STUDY AND RESEARCH

education USA

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Graduate and Professional Study and Research

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PREFACE

Graduate and Professional Study and Research is one of a series of four introductory booklets published by the U.S. Department of State to provide objective and practical advice to prospective international students and scholars on studying in the United States. All four booklets may be downloaded from the World Wide Web at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/, and print copies of Booklets One, Two, and Three are available from U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide (see pages 11–12 for more information about these centers).

The four booklets cover the following areas:

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

2 *Graduate and Professional Study and Research* — how to research and apply to U.S. master's, doctoral degree, and postdoctoral programs, plus information on certification and licensing procedures for professionals who wish to further their education or practice in the United States.

3 *Short-term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation* — information on opportunities to study in the United States for up to one year, plus an overview of studying towards a degree, diploma, or certificate from outside the United States through distance education programs. The booklet also includes detailed information on accreditation of U.S. higher education institutions.

4 *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States* — help with planning your move to the United States after you have been accepted to a U.S. university or college. This booklet provides invaluable advice on applying for a visa, moving to the United States, and what to expect when you arrive on campus. It is available only on the U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

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More than 1,700 universities and other institutions offer graduate degree programs in the United States. This vast choice means there are programs available to meet everyone's needs, but how can you find the best program for you? This booklet aims to give you not only the knowledge you need to make the right choices, but also the confidence to prepare successful applications. Chapter 9, "Specialized Professional Study," assists those interested in pursuing careers in dentistry, medicine, nursing, veterinary medicine, and law to understand the application process for each field. Chapter 10 discusses opportunities for postdoctoral candidates and scholars who wish to expand their opportunities with a U.S. academic experience.

Why Study in the United States?

Here are just a few of the reasons why more than 500,000[1] international students from around the world are furthering their education in the United States:

Quality: U.S. universities are known worldwide for their quality programs, faculty, facilities, and resources.

Choice: The U.S. education system offers an unrivalled choice of institutions, academic and social environments, entry requirements, degree programs, and subjects in which you can specialize.

Value: As an investment in your future, a U.S. degree offers excellent value for the money. A wide range of

tuition fees and living costs, plus financial help from many departments within universities, have made study in the United States affordable for thousands of students before you.

Within this booklet you will also find help with preparing successful applications (chapter 5) and with the visa application process (chapter 7). Once you have your offer of admission, you will want to check out the tips on what to expect when you arrive in the United States (chapter 8). At the end of the booklet, a glossary explains some of the words and phrases you will come across frequently when applying to study in the United States.

U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers

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

Choosing the best schools for you and preparing successful applications will require commitment and careful planning on your part, but in almost every country there are specialized advisers who understand your needs and can help you. Information and advice on study in the United States is available to you from a network of over 450 U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide. Directories, guides, college catalogs, and admissions test information are all available at the centers, as well as trained educational advisers who want to

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

— Psychology student from Malaysia

help you and your family with the process of choosing and applying to U.S. universities. Some centers also run events such as college fairs or seminars. Introductory information in the form of video or group presentations, Web site access, and independent resource libraries is available free of charge from information and advising centers, but payment may be required at some centers for additional services.

All U.S. educational information and advising centers are supported by the U.S. Department of State, with the goal of providing objective information on the range of study opportunities available in the United States; however, the names of the centers and the organizations that run them vary from country to country. To locate the center nearest you, contact your closest U.S. embassy or consulate, or consult the list available on the U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

Good luck with your applications!

Useful Web Sites

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

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

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

GRADUATE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Graduate education in the United States will almost certainly be different from the system offered in your country. This chapter gives you an introduction to the graduate degrees available in the United States, the different types of institutions that exist, and some key terms and ideas you will come across if you want to study at a U.S. university.

Graduate Degrees

The two graduate degrees offered in the United States are the master's degree and the doctoral degree; both involve a combination of research and coursework. Graduate education differs from undergraduate education in that it offers a greater depth of training, with increased specialization and intensity of instruction. Study and learning are more self-directed at the graduate level than at the undergraduate level.

Graduate courses assume that students are well-prepared in the basic elements of their field of study. Depending on the subject, courses may be quite formal, consisting primarily of lecture presentations by faculty members, or they may be relatively informal, placing emphasis on discussion and exchange of ideas among faculty and students. Seminars involve smaller groups of students than

lecture courses, and students may be required to make presentations as well as participate in discussions. Class participation, research papers, and examinations are all important.

Degree requirements are stated in terms of "credits" (sometimes called "units" or "hours"), and each course usually earns three or four credits, generally reflecting the number of hours spent in the classroom and the amount of other work involved. A student will usually accumulate 24 credits per academic year if the university operates on a traditional two-semester system.

Master's Degrees

The master's degree is designed to provide additional education or training in the student's specialized branch of knowledge, well beyond the level of baccalaureate study. Master's degrees are offered in many different fields, and there are two main types of programs: academic and professional.

Academic Master's: The master of arts (M.A.) and master of science (M.S.) degrees are usually awarded in the traditional arts, sciences, and humanities disciplines. The M.S. is also awarded in technical fields such as engineering and agriculture. Original research, research methodology, and field investigation are emphasized. These programs usually require the completion of between 30 and 60 credit hours and could reasonably be completed in one or two academic years of full-time study. They may lead directly to the doctoral level. (See "Important Difference" below.)

Many master's programs offer a thesis and a non-thesis option. The degree is the same in both cases, but the academic requirements are slightly different. Students in non-thesis programs usually take more coursework in place of researching and writing a thesis, and they take

a written comprehensive examination after all coursework is completed. Students in degree programs that include a thesis component generally take a comprehensive examination that is an oral exam covering both coursework and their thesis.

Professional Master's: These degree programs are designed to lead the student from the first degree to a particular profession. Professional master's degrees are most often "terminal" master's programs, meaning that they do not lead to doctoral programs. Such master's degrees are often designated by specific descriptive titles, such as master of business administration (M.B.A.), master of social work (M.S.W.), master of education (M.Ed.), or master of fine arts (M.F.A.). Other subjects of professional master's programs include journalism, international relations, architecture, and urban planning. Professional master's degrees are oriented more toward direct application of knowledge than toward original research. They are more structured than academic degree programs, and often require that every student take a similar or identical program of study that lasts from one to three years, depending on the institution and the field of study.

Professional degree programs usually require completion of between 36 and 48 units (one to two years of full-time study), and usually do not offer a thesis option. They do not always require that the bachelor's degree be in a specific field, but they may recommend a certain amount of prior study or coursework in the subject area.

Important Difference: One main difference between master's programs is whether or not they are designed for students who intend to continue toward a doctoral degree. Those that specifically do not lead into doctoral programs are known as terminal master's programs. Most professional master's degrees fall under this category. Credits earned in terminal master's programs may

or may not be transferable or applicable in case you decide to continue toward a doctoral degree later on.

Some institutions restrict admission to certain departments solely to potential doctoral candidates, although they may award a terminal master's degree to students who complete a certain level of coursework but do not go on to their doctoral work. Other departments require a master's degree as part of the requirements for admission to their doctoral program.

Since policies vary from institution to institution and within various departments of each institution, it is best to check directly with individual graduate departments to determine the structure and admissions policies for their master's and doctoral candidates.

Doctoral Degrees

The doctoral degree is designed to train research scholars and, in many cases, future college and university faculty members. Receipt of a doctoral degree certifies that the student has demonstrated capacity as a trained research scholar in a specific discipline.

At the doctoral level, the Ph.D. (doctor of philosophy) is the most common degree awarded in academic disciplines. Other doctoral degrees are awarded primarily in professional fields, such as education (Ed.D. or doctor of education) and business administration (D.B.A. or doctor of business administration). Doctoral programs involve advanced coursework, seminars, and the writing of a dissertation that describes the student's own original research, completed under the supervision of a faculty adviser.

A comprehensive examination is given, usually after three to five years of study and completion of all coursework, and when the student and adviser agree that the stu-

dent is ready. This exam is designed to test the student's ability to use knowledge gained through courses and independent study in a creative and original way. Students must demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of their chosen field of study. Successful completion of this examination marks the end of the student's coursework and the beginning of concentration on research.

The Ph.D. degree is awarded to those students who complete an original piece of significant research, write a dissertation describing that research, and successfully defend their work before a panel of faculty members who specialize in the discipline. This may take an additional two to three years. To earn a doctoral degree, therefore, may take anywhere from five to eight years beyond the bachelor's degree, depending on the field of study.

In the United States, you will find a variety of nontraditional doctoral programs; these programs might have very different types of requirements from the traditional programs. Prospective students should be sure of what is required to enter any program they are considering, and what is required to obtain the degree. This information is usually available from university catalogs and Web sites or directly from individual departments.

Academic Calendar

The academic year in the United States generally lasts nine months, from late August or early September until the middle or end of May, and it may be divided into two, three, or four academic terms depending on the institution. If the year is divided into two terms, these are called the fall and spring terms, or "semesters." Short breaks occur during both fall and spring terms, between terms, and on public holidays. An optional summer term is often available and provides the opportunity to continue courses if you wish to accelerate your program.

It is best to start a program in the fall term (beginning in August/September). Many courses must be taken in sequence, and time may be lost in completing the degree if you start in another term. It is also easier to become accustomed to studying in the United States and to meet other students in the department if you start at the beginning of the academic year. Lastly, scholarship opportunities may be more readily available to students starting in the fall rather than midyear. (See chapter 3, "Funding Graduate Study," for further information.)

Course Load and Grading Systems

"Course load" refers to the number of courses students take each term. The normal course load for a graduate student is three or four courses, which equals approximately nine to 12 credits per term. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service requires that international students take a course load that is considered full-time by the institution.

Passing grades are typically awarded on a scale of "A" through "D," and "F" indicates a failing grade for a course. An average grade of "B" is usually the minimum required for completion of a graduate degree program. Other grading systems may include a grade-point scale from 0 to 3, 4, or 5; pass/fail; high pass/low pass; or other variations.

Credit, course load, grading systems, and requirements vary between institutions. Make sure you are aware of the policies of an individual program and institution before you apply.

Types of Institutions

Colleges, Universities, and Institutes: The Distinction

Degree-granting institutions in the United States can

be called by any of these terms, and colleges and institutes are in no way inferior to universities. As a general rule, colleges tend to be smaller than universities and usually do not offer doctoral degrees, while a university offers a wide range of graduate programs, including doctoral degrees. Universities emphasize research as well as teaching (traditionally a strength of colleges), and universities that offer doctoral programs are usually referred to as research universities. The words "school," "college," and "university" will be used interchangeably throughout this booklet.

An institute usually specializes in degree programs in a group of closely related subject areas, so you will also come across degree programs offered at institutes of technology, institutes of fashion, institutes of art and design, and so on. Research centers offer graduate degrees or research and training opportunities, and they may or may not be affiliated with universities.

Within each institution you may find schools such as the school of arts and sciences or school of business. Each school is responsible for the degree programs offered by the college or university in that area of study.

Private and Public Institutions

Both public and private universities offer degree programs. The terms "public" and "private" refer to the way in which universities are financially supported.

Public universities may also be called state universities, and some include the words "state university" in their title or include a regional element such as "eastern" or "northern." State universities tend to be very large with enrollments of 20,000 or more students. Since public universities obtain a part of their support from the state in which they are located, the tuition they charge is often lower than that charged by private institutions. In addi-

tion, public institutions generally charge lower tuition to state residents (those who live and pay taxes in the state) than to students coming from outside the state. International students are considered out-of-state residents and therefore do not benefit from reduced tuition at state institutions.

Private institutions are supported by student tuition, investment income, research contracts, and private donations. Tuition fees tend to be higher at private universities than at state universities, and they charge the same tuition to all students, both state and non-state residents. Colleges with a religious affiliation and single-sex colleges are private. In general, private universities have enrollments of fewer than 20,000 students, and private colleges may have 2,000 or fewer students on their campuses.

Except for financial considerations, the public or private nature of a university should not be a factor in selecting a graduate program. High quality programs exist in both types of institutions. Of more importance is the institution's commitment to the graduate program. This commitment is found in its willingness to maintain a first-class faculty and to provide excellent facilities for advanced study, including libraries, laboratories, computers, and other equipment. Another important factor to consider in many disciplines is the presence of strong departments in other fields relevant to your interests so that you can have access to scholars and courses in disciplines related to your own. Choosing institutions for graduate study is discussed in further detail in the next chapter.

Distance Education

Distance education is an increasingly popular way to study for everything from a short professional course to a doctoral degree in the United States, and numerous

institutions offer graduate degree programs using distance education teaching methods. Under the distance education model, students do not attend classes in a classroom on a campus; instead, classes are delivered "from a distance" through the use of technologies such as the Internet, satellite television, video conferencing, and other means of electronic delivery. For international students this means that they can study for a U.S. degree without leaving their home country, though they may have to go to the United States for short periods of face-to-face contact and study on the campus.

Studying for a degree using distance education requires students to have special qualities such as self-discipline and the ability to work on their own. If you are considering distance education, you should thoroughly research the quality of the program, the accreditation of the institution in the United States, and its recognition in your home country to make sure this option is the appropriate one for your future goals. Further information on distance education and accreditation are provided in the third booklet of this series, *Short-term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation*.

Non-degree Study at a U.S. University

Do you want to study in the United States at a college or university, but not for a full degree? Perhaps you want to experience life on a U.S. campus, while improving your knowledge of certain subjects. This is certainly a useful addition to your educational experience, and U.S. colleges welcome students such as you. You should write to universities, explain your situation, and request information on applying for "special student" or "non-degree student" status. See Booklet Three in this series for more information on short-term study opportunities in the United States.

Time for a Recap

- The two graduate degrees offered in the United States are the master's degree and the doctoral degree. Both include coursework and independent research. The length of time taken to complete the degree varies considerably between programs: from 12 to 24 months for a master's degree and from five to eight years beyond a bachelor's degree for a doctoral program.

- Master's degree programs can be either academic or professional, and they may or may not be designed to lead students to a doctoral degree. Check university catalogs and departmental descriptions carefully to determine the structure of the programs that interest you.

- It is also possible to study at the graduate level in the United States as a non-degree-seeking "special student."

- The academic year lasts nine months and is divided into semesters, trimesters, or quarters.

- Coursework is measured in hours, credits, or units.

- Passing grades on courses are "A," "B," "C," and "D," though sometimes a point system is used. Graduate students are usually required to maintain a "B" grade average to remain in the program and to receive their degree.

- Institutions offering graduate degree programs in the United States can be called colleges, universities, or institutes. The main difference between them is usually the degree levels offered and the level of specialization in the subject areas offered.

- Institutions vary considerably in size and location. They may be private or public, designations that indicate only the sources of funding for the institution and not the quality or range of programs they offer.

Useful Web Sites

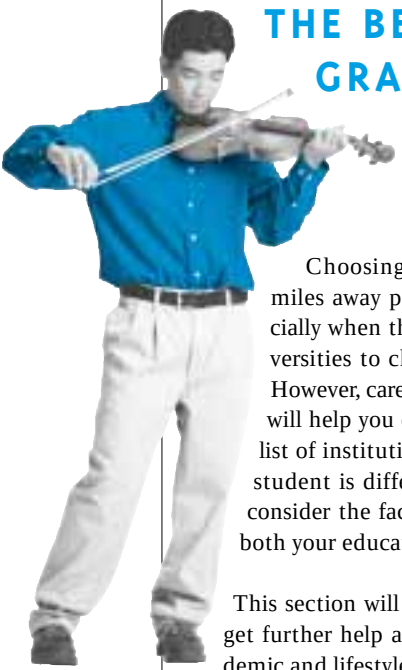
Overviews of the U.S. Education System
http://www.ed.gov/NLE/USNEI/
http://www.edupass.org

Distance Education
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/ (Refer to the "Useful Web Sites" listings in the on-line version of Booklet Three of this series.)

Non-degree Study in the United States
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/
(Refer to the "Useful Web Sites" listings in the on-line version of Booklet Three of this series for short-term study and English language programs.)

For information on university Web sites, see chapter 2 in this booklet.

CHOOSING THE BEST GRADUATE PROGRAMS FOR YOU



Choosing universities from thousands of miles away presents some challenges — especially when there are so many outstanding universities to choose from in the United States. However, careful planning and advance research will help you come up with a manageable short list of institutions that match your needs. Every student is different, and it is very important to consider the factors that are important to you in both your education and your lifestyle.

This section will give you some ideas on where to get further help and information and on what academic and lifestyle factors to consider in developing a short list of universities. Finding the right academic and personal match requires careful planning, research, and networking on your part. No special formula or answer applies to everyone. You should begin the process of reflection and research 12 to 18 months before you wish to start studying in the United States.

STEP 1
Define Your Education and Career Goals

Defining the goals for your education and career will help you select the most appropriate graduate programs and will help motivate you through the application process. It will also assist you in writing the application

essays in which you often will be asked to explain your career goals and how they relate to your application for graduate study. Lastly, defining your career goals will lead you to find out exactly what qualifications are required for that career and whether or not U.S. credentials are recognized in your home country.

To help define your education and career goals, ask yourself these questions:

- What career do I want to pursue? Is employment available in my country in this field? What advanced degree is required to enter this profession?

  Speak to people already working in the field and to representatives of professional associations. Educational advisers or career advisers in your country may also have information about the skills and background required for various professions, as well as knowledge of the need for professionals in different fields in your country.

- How will study in the United States enhance my career? Will a graduate degree help me earn a higher salary?

  Consult educators, government officials, and working professionals in your country about the value of U.S. study for you at this stage in your career, including any increased earning potential. Take into account in your planning any revalidation or certification requirements for employment in your particular field when you return home.

- What is the system of recognition for U.S. degrees in my country?

  In many countries, a U.S. degree is highly valued, and recognition of degrees is straightforward. However,

in some countries, particularly those with educational systems markedly different from that of the United States, graduate degrees from the United States may not be officially recognized, or they may be recognized at a different level. If this is the case, you may still wish to consider U.S. study to gain knowledge and experience. Check on the situation in your country with your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center or with the ministry of education or other appropriate authority before you begin your applications. Refer to the chapter on accreditation in Booklet Three of this series. This step is especially important if you are planning to undertake a professional program in the United States, because requirements for professional education usually are rigorously upheld and vary greatly from country to country.

STEP 2
Consult a U.S. Educational Information or Advising Center

"You can easily get information from everywhere, but knowing how to select the right program can be much harder."

– Germanic languages and literature student from Hungary

Trained educational advisers in these offices provide information and advice about study in the United States. Advisers are available to assist you in answering questions about:

- equivalency between the educational system in your country and the United States;
- entry requirements for study in your field;
- using reference materials to find institutions that are appropriate for you;
- sources of financial assistance available in your home country and in the United States;

- testing and other application requirements;
- preparation of your applications;
- planning your education;
- adjusting to academic and cultural life in the United States;
- using your education after you return to your home country.

To find the information or advising center nearest you, contact the American embassy or consulate in your country, or consult the list available on the U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/. U.S. educational information and advising centers may be located in U.S. embassies, Fulbright Commissions, binational centers, American libraries, or, in some countries, at AMIDEAST or Institute of International Education (IIE) offices.

When you contact the center, you should be able to provide the following information:

- the degree(s) you have already earned;
- your field of study;
- when you want to begin study in the United States;
- your English language proficiency;
- whether or not you need financial assistance.

In addition to educational advisers, graduates of U.S. colleges and universities who have recently returned home are excellent resources for advice about study in the United States.

STEP 3
Develop a Short List of Programs

Deciding which institutions to apply to is one of the most important decisions you will make. It requires serious consideration. Since there is a great deal of diversity in graduate programs, it is especially important to

"Talk to someone who has gone through the process. They can provide you with information you won't find in any school brochure."

— Medical student from Ghana

clearly articulate what it is you wish to accomplish and find out which institutions offer the kind of program you are seeking.

Identify Universities That Offer Your Field of Study

Your first and most important step is to identify institutions that offer your subject area and any specializations you wish to pursue within that subject area. Finding the right academic "match" between you, the department, and its faculty by using the various human, electronic, and printed resources below can be the key to a successful graduate experience in the United States.

Printed Directories: There are several general directories that list institutions by degree program and include helpful articles on graduate study (see the bibliography at the end of this booklet). Professional associations for different subject areas also publish directories of university departments in the United States, including information on different specializations and faculty research interests. University catalogs provide the most specific information about the institutions and their programs. You will find many of these directories and catalogs at U.S. educational information and advising centers and in some university libraries.

Contacts: Discuss your plans with faculty members at your institution and with students who have studied in the United States. They are likely to have their own contacts in the United States and suggestions of universities to consider. Also, do not be afraid to contact universities in the United States directly with questions about their programs or to communicate with other international students in the department you're interested in.

College Web Sites and E-Mail: The United States leads the world in using the World Wide Web. Almost every U.S. university and college has a Web site that offers

information about degree programs, application procedures, academic departments, faculty members, facilities on campus, and other topics. In many cases, you will also find a copy of the college catalog that you can study online or download to read later. Don't forget that many sites also give e-mail addresses for current students, including international students, who often are happy to answer your questions about applying to the school and about campus life. Once you have narrowed down the colleges and universities you are interested in, you may wish to e-mail professors and admissions personnel to have specific questions answered before you finally decide where to apply.

College Searches on the Web: Some Web sites are independent of colleges and universities and allow you to search for institutions by the subject you are interested in studying, by geographic preference, or by a range of other criteria that you can specify. See the list at the end of this chapter for Web sites offering university searches. Staff at U.S. educational information and advising centers can assist you in the use of search sites on the Internet and offer suggestions for locating information on specific programs.

> **"Contact universities so that you can be sure the program you are considering is exactly what you wish it to be."**
>
> *— Logistics student from Portugal*

Three additional sources of information are:

U.S. University Fairs and Visits: Representatives of U.S. universities may come to visit your country. Your information or advising center can tell you about upcoming U.S. university fairs or other types of visits where you can talk to admissions officers or faculty members face-to-face. Since many fairs and tours will take place in the

spring or the fall of the year before you intend to start your studies, it is important to start your research early.

Visiting Campuses: If you are able to take a vacation to the United States, this could be a great opportunity to visit campuses that interest you. Many universities organize campus tours that are led by current students; check with the admissions office for further information. Visit the academic and housing facilities, the student union, and the library to get a good sense of the campus. Americans are famous for being friendly, so talk to the students to find out what U.S. university life is really like.

"The Web is a vital tool as the USA is moving more and more across to this as their primary communication method."

— MBA student from Great Britain

Educational Consultants and Recruiting Agents: In many parts of the world, private agents or agencies work to recruit international students into U.S. colleges. There are also private educational consultants who charge a fee for assisting you with the process of choosing U.S. universities and putting together your applications. Often these educational consultants and private agents are graduates of U.S. colleges or people who are dedicated to promoting the benefits and advantages of the U.S. education system. However, sometimes they are not, so it is important to check the credentials and past performance of educational consultants or agents before using their services.

If you have found a recruiting agent or a consultant who is helpful, well informed, and dependable, she or he may be very useful in helping you to select and apply to a university in the United States. Be careful, however, to look for verifiable signs of the agent or consultant's past success stories with students from your country. Ask the agent or consultant for a list of names and addresses of students presently studying in the United States who are there because of his or her help. Write, e-mail, or telephone some of these students to get their firsthand opinion of the college where they study and the services they received from the agent or consultant. Such precautions

are especially important if the agent or consultant is asking for expensive fees for his or her services. Lastly, always check with an unbiased source (such as a U.S. educational information or advising center) to ensure the legitimacy and accreditation status of the university being represented to you.

Check Accreditation Status

One of the major indicators of the quality of any U.S. college or university is its accreditation status. It is important to check that all institutions you are considering are appropriately accredited. Unlike many other countries, the United States does not have a central governmental body that approves educational institutions. Instead, it relies on a system of voluntary accreditation carried out by nongovernmental accrediting bodies to ensure that schools meet standards.

While almost all U.S. universities hold widely recognized forms of accreditation, it must be noted that accreditation in the United States is a complex area; there are different types of accreditation (institutional and programmatic) and a large number of accrediting bodies. There is also no legal requirement that degree-offering institutions be accredited or hold a particular form of accreditation. Because of this complexity, you should check carefully whether a degree from the institutions you are applying to will be recognized by your home-country government and by any relevant professional associations, ministries, and employers. Also talk to graduates who have returned to your country to see if they have been successful in applying degrees earned from such institutions to their chosen professions.

U.S. educational information and advising centers can advise you regarding recognition of U.S. degrees in your country and tell you whether a particular U.S. degree-offering institution is appropriately accredited. More

detailed information on the topic of accreditation can be found in the third booklet in this series, *Short-term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation*, and on the Web sites listed at the end of this chapter.

Other Considerations

Rankings: There is no official list of the top 10, 20, 50, or even 100 universities in the United States. The U.S. government does not rank universities. Rankings that you may come across are usually produced by journalists and are likely to be subjective. They generally are based on a wide range of criteria that do not necessarily include academic standards or general reputation as a primary factor. Be particularly wary of rankings that do not explain the criteria on which the ranking is based. The more established rankings may give you a starting point for your decision; however, the "best" college is the one that is right for you based on factors such as those suggested in this chapter.

Internship or Overseas Study Programs: Many U.S. universities have incorporated into their curriculum internship (voluntary or paid work placements) or overseas study ("study abroad") programs that may be of interest to you, particularly if you are undertaking a professional master's degree program.

Size: Some institutions are small and offer degrees in one or two fields of study; some are very large and offer degrees in many fields. When choosing where to apply, you should consider the size of the institution, as well as the size of the department and degree program. A large institution may offer better academic facilities, while a small institution may offer more personal services. The same is true of the size of the degree program. A large program that has many students may not provide the individual attention you need; however, there may be more diversity within the faculty and student body, and more

assistance may be available from other students. A small degree program may not expose you to as wide a range of views in your chosen field.

Student populations on U.S. campuses can range in size from 200 to 60,000 students. Some universities resemble small cities with their own post offices, grocery stores, and shopping centers. Other institutions may be in large, densely populated urban areas but have a very small enrollment. Determine what opportunities are important to you, and read the university catalogs closely with these in mind.

Location: Universities are located in all parts of the United States, from major cities where many institutions may exist, to rural areas where one institution serves a large area. Urban campuses offer a variety of eating, entertainment, cultural, and shopping facilities. Cities are usually more diverse in their populations than rural areas and may have a significant number of residents from particular countries. However, cities may also be more expensive. A rural university may mean a quieter, more college-centered environment. Climate is another possible consideration. From the four seasons in the Northeast to the desert in Arizona and a sub-tropical climate in Florida, the variety is almost endless.

Student Services: U.S. universities offer students a variety of services such as international student advisers, campus orientation programs, counseling services, legal aid services, housing offices, day care facilities for students with families, varied meal plans, health centers, tutoring facilities, English as a Second Language programs, writing laboratories, career counseling, and more. Prospective students can compare facilities among universities to find services tailored to their specific needs.

Services for Students With Disabilities: If you have special needs, make sure that the university you choose can

accommodate you. Allow plenty of time to correspond with colleges. It is advisable to begin your inquiries at least two years before you plan to leave for the United States. When you write for information from universities, give brief details of your disability and request information about assistance they offer to students like yourself. You may also want to contact the office on campus that deals with the special needs of students with disabilities to find out more about the services they provide. This may be a specific office, such as the Office of Disabled Student Services or the Office of Disability Services, or services may be housed within a general student services office on campus.

Some universities offer comprehensive programs for students with disabilities, while others make a number of special services available to such students. You should look at the services offered and compare them to your needs. Find out which services are provided automatically and free of charge and which services need to be prearranged and incur a charge. When you apply you will need to supply evidence to support the existence of your disability. A campus visit is recommended. If possible, try to contact a student at the college who has a similar disability to yours so you can gain a more personal perspective. Students with disabilities can, with proper documentation, request special facilities or extended time to take the graduate school admissions tests and any examinations during the academic year.

STEP 4
Decide Where to Apply

Once you have narrowed down your list to 10 to 20 accredited institutions that offer your field of study and any relevant specializations, you will need to compare the objective data among these institutions. Do not rely solely on rankings or ratings of institutions to do this; there is more to choosing the right department than

choosing the most well-known or selective university. For any particular discipline there will be at least five or six schools that have excellent reputations. Keep in mind that a department's reputation relies heavily on the reputation of its faculty. Sometimes it is more important to study under a particular person than it is to study at a university with a prestigious name. Remember too that assistantships and fellowships are often based on the right "match" between student and faculty research interests. Good advance research can help you find the schools whose departments and faculty meet your academic and professional goals, and it may enhance your chances for obtaining financial assistance.

Make a comparison chart listing the differences among universities with respect to:

- research programs and facilities, including libraries and computer facilities;
- size of department (students and faculty) and size of institution;
- qualifications of the faculty;
- accreditation of the institution and, if applicable, the department or program;
- course and thesis requirements;
- length of time required to complete the degree;
- academic admission requirements, including required test scores (see chapter 4 for further information), degrees, and undergraduate grade average required;
- cost of tuition, fees, books, etc.;
- availability of financial assistance (see chapter 3 for further information);
- location, housing options, campus setting, climate, and cost of living;
- international student services and other needed services available on campus.

Eliminate those institutions that you cannot afford and that do not offer financial aid for which you qualify, that

do not meet your individual needs, or that have admissions requirements that do not match your qualifications. Narrow your choices to those that meet your personal and professional needs, that you can afford to attend, and for which you are qualified for admission. Develop a final short list of four to seven institutions to which you plan to apply. See chapter 5, "Preparing Successful Applications," for further guidelines.

Time for a Recap

- First, define your educational and career goals to help you select the most appropriate programs.
- U.S. educational information and advising centers can provide information and advice not only on degree programs, but also on all aspects of study in the United States.
- Directories and Web sites are useful sources of information, but you should also speak to faculty at your institution and to students who have studied in the United States. U.S. university fairs and campus visits are useful tools to help you identify suitable programs. Rankings may be helpful, but they should be used with caution and in conjunction with other, more objective, data.
- Always check the accreditation status of any degree programs to which you are considering applying, and find out if the degree will be recognized in your home country.
- Once you have identified a short list of programs that offer your subject area and specialization(s), make comparisons between the programs in terms of financial costs and assistance available, admission and degree requirements, the composition of the faculty and student body, and campus services and facilities.

Useful Web Sites

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

Links to University Homepages
http://www.siu.no/heir

University Search Sites
http://www.collegenet.com
http://www.collegeview.com
http://www.educationconnect.com
http://www.embark.com
http://www.gradschools.com
http://www.petersons.com
http://www.studyusa.com

Accreditation Information
http://www.chea.org
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa. (Refer to chapter 4, "Accreditation," in the on-line version of Booklet Three of this series.)

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

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

FUNDING GRADUATE STUDY

Education in the United States may seem expensive, but you have probably already realized that it offers excellent value for the money invested. This chapter looks in more detail at the costs involved in U.S. graduate study and ways in which you might cover your expenses, including financial aid from universities and other sources.

Planning Ahead

It is a myth that international students can easily get the money they need for study after they have been admitted to a college or university in the United States. In fact, such an assumption can lead to hardship and disappointment. Most institutions have committed all their scholarship and loan funds long before the academic year begins. Also, as part of the application for a student visa, you must be able to show proof to both the graduate school admissions office and to your local U.S. embassy or consulate that you have sufficient funds to meet the total annual expenses. If you plan to bring a spouse and/or children with you to the United States, you will also need to prove in advance that you have funds to support your family.

The best time to arrange U.S.-based financial assistance is before you leave home. Deadlines for scholarship and grant programs can be as early as one-and-a-half years before departure. Universities often require students to complete a

financial statement, specifying how they intend to cover their expenses, as part of the application process.

Planning ahead will give you time to research independent scholarships and to identify university programs that have funding available. If possible, also try to make personal contact with professors in your department of interest at U.S. universities, since professors play an important role in identifying grant and funding recipients in their departments.

Calculating Your Expenses

The main types of costs involved in study in the United States are tuition and fees, plus living costs. These vary widely, which gives you some control over the costs involved in your education. All U.S. universities publish information on the costs for their institution and area. Consider the points outlined below in calculating your costs.

Tuition and Fees

Tuition is the cost of instruction, while fees are charged for services such as the library, student activities, or the health center. International graduate students are required to pay both tuition and fees, unless covered by financial assistance. Some universities also charge international students mandatory health insurance fees.

Although the range of tuition and fees may vary greatly from school to school, there is no correlation between the level of tuition and fees and the quality of an institution. The amount charged by a particular university depends on many factors, the most significant of which is what type of school it is. Tuition and fees are generally higher for private universities than for state schools. State universities charge out-of-state residents higher tuition than state residents. In almost all instances, inter-

national students studying at state schools will have to pay this higher rate throughout their study program since they do not qualify for residents' rates. It should be remembered, too, that not all universities charging the lowest tuition and fees have the lowest living costs; you should examine both factors to get a more accurate estimate of your annual expenses.

Since tuition and fees vary between institutions and rise an average of 5 percent each year, it is best to consult current university catalogs, Web sites, or reference material available at your U.S. educational information or advising center for the latest figures. Be sure to confirm current costs with the institution at the time you apply.

Living Costs

Living costs vary widely and depend on individual lifestyles. If you are bringing family members with you to the United States, this will, of course, increase your monthly expenses.

Living expenses are highest in the large cities, in California, and in the Northeast. Costs can be much lower in the South, the Midwest, and other areas. University catalogs and Web sites are good sources of information on current living costs. Within the total living costs they quote, you will usually find an approximate breakdown of costs for items such as room, board, books, medical insurance, and personal expenses. Your U.S. educational information or advising center may also have information on the latest monthly living expenses by city or institution.

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

Books and Supplies: Universities estimate the cost for books and supplies for the academic year. Students studying in the United States must buy their textbooks, and

book costs can be quite expensive. Most institutions have on-campus bookstores. Many of these stores allow you to purchase used books at a lesser cost, or sell back your books at the end of a semester at partial value. If you are planning to study in a field that requires special supplies, such as engineering, art, or architecture, your expenses are likely to be greater than the average.

Transportation: The living costs quoted by most universities do not cover trips between the United States and your home country. Be sure that your annual budget includes expenses for return travel between your home country and your school. If you plan to live off-campus and commute to the university, you should add in your commuting expenses.

Other Personal Expenses: Personal expenses include items such as the cost of basic goods, clothing, and services. Health insurance is required. If you have dependents — a spouse and/or children — or if you have special medical needs, substantial additional funds will be needed to meet your living expenses.

Financing Your Education

It is important to start your financial planning at least 12 months before you intend to study in the United States. Financing your college education consists of:

- assessing personal funds;
- identifying financial assistance for which you are eligible;
- compiling effective applications (see chapter 5);
- reducing educational costs.

Assessing Personal Funds

Consider all the funds you have available, and how much you can draw from each source. For example:

- **annual family income**: the earnings per year of each member of the immediate family who will provide money toward your education;
- **family assets**: current holdings in bank accounts, investments in stocks and bonds, business enterprises, debts owed to the family, and any other assets from which money could be obtained through sales or loans in an emergency;
- **your own earnings until departure**: savings from earnings, gifts, investments, or property;
- **other sources**: relatives in the United States or a sponsor (individual, government agency, or private organization) in your country who has agreed to pay all or part of your educational expenses.

If you cannot pay the costs of your study through the personal funds you have available, you will need to apply for financial assistance.

Identifying Sources of Financial Assistance

You can apply for financial assistance from a variety of sources; however, it is important to apply only for those funds for which you are eligible.

Competition for grants is keen; an incomplete, tardy, poorly written, or messy application could make the difference between you and another applicant. So plan ahead, plan well, prepare carefully, and follow instructions. Give yourself plenty of time to put together a quality request for financial assistance and submit it well ahead of all deadlines.

For further information about sources of financial aid, consult the resources listed at the end of this chapter. Many of the references and directories are available at U.S. educational information and advising centers, and advisers at the centers may know of additional home-country sources. Also visit the Web sites listed at the end of this chapter.

Home-Country Sources: Ask at an information or advising center or consult local contacts about funding from government scholarship programs, regional assistance programs, local or third-country organizations or businesses, banks, or religious institutions that may offer aid to graduate students from your country.

U.S. Government Assistance: The Fulbright Program, founded to encourage mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries, offers awards for graduate study. There are many different types of awards, from travel grants to grants that pay maintenance and study costs; their availability varies from country to country. Applicants must apply to and be approved by appropriate agencies in the home country. If there is a Fulbright Commission in your country, inquire about the types of grants available; if not, any U.S. educational information or advising center can help you get further information, or you can inquire at the public affairs section of the U.S. embassy or consulate.

In some developing countries, support for short-term graduate study or master's level degree study may be available through programs sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Eligibility for these programs varies, but in general, local institutions nominate employees for training or education that promotes a specified development goal.

Some scholarship programs operate on a regional basis. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) funds a program called ATLAS — Advanced Training for Leadership and Skills. U.S. educational information and advising centers can tell you about other U.S. government-sponsored programs functioning in your home country.

Note that U.S. Department of Education and state-based financial aid are available only to U.S. citizens.

Private U.S. Sources and International Organizations: Private U.S. agencies, foundations, business corporations, and professional associations often award financial aid in the interest of furthering international exchange. International organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) are other possible sources of financial aid. Since these institutions are large and complex, writing to them directly with general requests for financial aid will have little effect. Use references available at information and advising centers to find specific awards or grants for which you are eligible, and address the office indicated. Many awards and grants are directed toward particular groups such as women, engineers, or journalists; read carefully to see whether you fit into any of the categories. Greater foundation support usually is available for students in the social and natural sciences and in the humanities. Apply only for awards for which you match the criteria.

If an application requires that you write a research or project proposal, pay particular attention to this step. If possible, have the proposal checked by a professional in your field who has worked in the United States. For more information, see "Writing a Research Proposal" on page 48.

U.S. Universities: About one-third of international graduate students finance their studies through financial aid from U.S. universities. However, availability of financial assistance varies by field of study, level of study, and type of institution (research universities are likely to have the most funds available). Also, some universities will give aid to students only after they have successfully completed their first semester or first year of study.

To identify universities that offer financial assistance, consult university reference books or computer search software at information and advising centers. You can

also find information on financial assistance directly from university catalogs and Web sites. Some university reference books provide information on financial aid awarded to first-year graduate students, but these statistics include U.S. students as well as international students. Also, all students, including international students, are required to pay U.S. income tax on certain forms of graduate financial assistance. If you are awarded a grant by a university, be sure to check with the institution to see if you are subject to any type of taxation.

The main types of financial aid available from universities are:

- **Fellowships:** Departments and institutions award fellowships on the basis of academic merit, normally after the first year of study. Graduate fellowships may be modest, covering only tuition and fees, or full grants, providing the cost of tuition, fees, and monthly stipends for maintenance. Fellowships rarely cover the total cost of living and studying.

- **Assistantships:** Assistantships are the most common form of financial aid at the graduate level. Assistantships are cash awards that require the performance of services related to the field of study, usually about 20 hours per week. Sometimes an assistantship carries with it a waiver (a remission or reduction) of tuition and fees. Awards may range from as little as $500 to as much as $30,000 (or higher, if high tuition costs are waived) for an academic year, so it is important to check what proportion of your costs the assistantship will cover. There are several types of assistantships:

  - Teaching assistantships may be available for the first year of graduate study in university departments with large numbers of undergraduates in introductory courses. Teaching assistants (TAs) supervise undergraduate laboratory classes, lead

discussion groups, or teach small classes. Increasingly, universities require that applicants achieve a high score on the Test of Spoken English (TSE) before receiving a teaching assistantship. Often universities require teaching assistants to complete training programs that prepare them to teach in the U.S. educational milieu. If you are interested in applying for a teaching assistantship, be sure to mention in your application any previous teaching experience that you have had.

— Research assistantships involve performance of research services related to the field of study. The advantage of a research assistantship is that it can be related to your thesis or long-term academic interests. Research assistants (RAs) are chosen for their demonstrated research and interpersonal skills. Computer ability, writing skills, and experience working as part of a team are three essential qualifications. Find institutions that have grants in your field, and apply to these universities for research assistantships. If you apply to institutions whose research funding matches your interests, professors who are the principal researchers for grants in your area will often single out your application for funding, especially if you have proven research experience.

— Administrative assistantships usually require 10 to 20 hours per week working in administrative offices of the university, such as the International Student Office. You will need to contact each office individually at most institutions, although a few may have a central location for applications. Read the material from each institution to learn where to send applications.

Competition for all types of assistantships is intense, since only limited numbers are available at any one

institution. International applicants must compete with U.S. students. In general, doctoral students are more likely to receive support than master's candidates. Although financial need is taken into consideration, the most important factor in selection is academic achievement and promise in the field of study. Practically all awards for graduate study are made one year at a time. Renewal is not automatic and depends on your performance and the availability of funds; however, in general, departments will do all they can to ensure you receive continued financial support. Once enrolled at an institution, you should begin seeking funding for the next academic year.

To apply for university funding, find out which offices are responsible for the various programs and request application materials. The graduate school may control the funds, or the department or program may administer them, or a combination of both. Read carefully all the information pertaining to funding, since the application process can be complex and time-consuming.

When an offer is made, compare the total award package, including tuition and fees, amount of stipend, length of award, and work responsibilities. If you receive more than one offer, you will have to weigh the benefits of each award from each institution and make the best decision. The decision of which institution to attend should never be based on the amount of an award alone, since financial assistance has nothing to do with the quality of the program. Selecting an institution is a complex and important decision; be sure to take all factors into consideration to make the choices that are best for you.

- **Employment**: Other types of aid for full-time students include part-time employment on campus of up to 20 hours per week. Present U.S. immigration regulations restrict employment outside the university for both international graduate students and their

spouses; in many instances, spouses cannot engage in any kind of employment, on or off campus, throughout the entire period of study. On-campus employment is limited and competitive, and the relatively low salaries do not cover the cost of tuition and living expenses. In addition, graduate students are often so involved with their academic work that they do not have the time required for a part-time job. Lastly, employment in the United States cannot be used to demonstrate how you will pay the costs of study when applying for a student visa.

- **Loans:** A few reputable agencies make loans available to international students. Consult your information or advising center for information on loans for students from your country. Before taking a loan, make certain you know how you are going to repay it and how a loan will affect your plans for later study and for returning home.

Writing a Research Proposal

To receive funds for research or study in the United States, some organizations require that you submit a carefully designed plan for your proposed research. As a rule, your proposal will be competing with those of other excellent scholars. It is not enough to state your qualifications by simply citing your diploma, your position, or your experience.

When a department committee or review board looks at research proposals, they compare competing proposals with respect to several criteria:

Is the proposed institution appropriate? Does the institution have researchers who will be interested in the project and able to supervise the work? If equipment is nec-

essary, is the right equipment available, or are funds available for buying it? Are library or research collection facilities adequate?

Does the applicant clearly show the necessary background in education and experience to be able to do the research successfully? Has he or she demonstrated research aptitude? Supporting documents or past papers are helpful.

Is the proposal carefully written and neatly presented? The proposal should begin with a clear statement of goals of the intended research project. It should include a summary of background information regarding the need for the research, highlights of related research (with a bibliography), a step-by-step description of the research plan with expected results or major theses, and a conclusion. The proposal should be typed.

Is the proposed research significant, timely, and original? Although creativity, originality, and substance are usually the most important criteria in choosing among proposals, disciplines differ. In some fields, such as medicine, proposals that have great promise of practical application may have an advantage.

If you are applying for a grant or program that supports development in your country, it may be helpful if the research you propose can be applied to your work after you return to your home country.

Time for a Recap

- Start your financial planning at the same time you begin choosing programs of study – 12 to 18 months before you wish to study in the United States.

- Tuition costs vary from one institution to another, and cost is not an indication of the quality of an institution.

- Living expenses vary depending on your lifestyle and location.

- You must carefully calculate the costs involved in U.S. study and your possible sources of funds to cover these costs. If you and your family cannot meet the costs, you will need to apply for financial assistance.

- Possible sources of financial assistance include: home government scholarships, U.S. government assistance, private U.S. sources and international organizations, U.S. universities, and loans.

- Many international students finance their studies through financial assistance from universities; however, availability of such funding varies considerably by field of study, level of study, and type of institution. Some institutions also limit the funding they give to international students.

- The main types of university financial assistance are fellowships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and administrative assistantships. Students offered such funding should fully investigate the responsibilities involved and the level of funding being offered before accepting an award.

Useful Web Sites

General Information on Financial Aid for International Students
http://www.edupass.org/finaid
http://www.nafsa.org/ (Look under "Grants and Scholarships")
http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/oseas/aid.html

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

Graduate Scholarship Awarding Bodies:

National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, Institute of Medicine and the National Research Council
http://www.nas.edu

National Endowment for the Humanities
http://www.neh.fed.us/

National Science Foundation
http://www.nsf.gov

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
http://wwics.si.edu

Information on Grant-Awarding Bodies:

The Foundation Center
http://www.fdncenter.org/grantmaker/

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

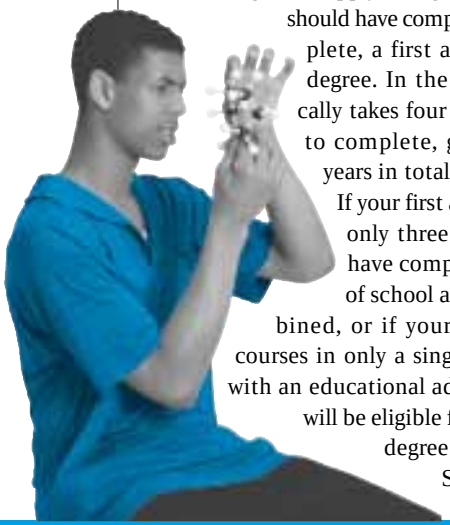
Tax Information for International Students
http://www.edupass.org/finaid/taxes.phtml
http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/

ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND ENTRANCE EXAMINATIONS

The main requirements for admission to educational institutions in the United States are:

- a strong academic background;
- demonstrated command of the English language;
- for many programs, scores on one or more standardized admissions tests;
- adequate financial resources (see chapter 3).

Academic Background



To be eligible to apply for a graduate level program, you should have completed, or be about to complete, a first academic or professional degree. In the United States this typically takes four years of university study to complete, giving U.S. students 16 years in total at school and university. If your first academic degree required only three years of study, or if you have completed only 14 or 15 years of school and university study combined, or if your degree study involved courses in only a single technical field, check with an educational adviser about whether you will be eligible for admission to graduate degree programs in the United States. Note that although

all U.S. universities follow the same general guidelines, they may differ in the level at which they recognize a particular degree from your country.

Graduate school applicants should also have excellent grades, particularly in the chosen field of study. Most graduate departments require, at a minimum, the equivalent of a U.S. "B" grade average in undergraduate work. Staff at U.S. educational information and advising centers will be able to tell you the equivalent to this grade average in your own educational system. Proven research ability or relevant work experience also increases your chances of admission at the graduate level.

English Proficiency

To complete graduate study in the United States successfully, you will need to be able to read, write, and communicate orally in English with a high degree of proficiency. English language proficiency will also help you to achieve your academic and personal goals while in the United States.

To determine your level of English language proficiency, arrange to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) as early as possible — at least a year before you plan to enroll. As with many areas of U.S. education, each institution sets its own English language admission standard, but some guidelines on the standard required are given in the section on TOEFL scores below. Some institutions accept English language examinations other than TOEFL; check the information you receive from institutions to see which examinations they accept.

Even if you have a good basic level of English proficiency and have met the minimum TOEFL requirements for a university, some schools may require you to take courses to improve your mastery of American English, academic or research usage, and study skills. If you stud-

ied English under the British system, you may find that U.S. vocabulary and usage are quite different.

If you are applying for a teaching assistantship, the university may ask you to demonstrate your proficiency in spoken English, which the TOEFL examination does not test. The Test of Spoken English (TSE), often required for this purpose, is offered less frequently and at fewer centers than TOEFL. Allow several additional months for the application process if you are applying for a teaching assistantship.

TOEFL Waivers: If you are a non-U.S. citizen and non-native speaker of English who has been educated in English for most of your school life, your TOEFL requirement may be waived. Allow time in the application process to correspond with U.S. universities about this issue. American universities are unlikely to accept secondary school English language examination results as proof of your language ability.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

> **"There are many great TOEFL preparation books that can help you with exercises for the test. You need to be familiar with the structure of the TOEFL and prepare for it."**
>
> *— Literature student from Hungary*

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

Test Registration: Preregistration is required, and it is NOT possible to go to the testing center and hope to

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

TOEFL registration bulletins are available from either the test administrators in the United States (see page 60), the regional registration center for your country (see the TOEFL Web site at http://www.toefl.org or the test registration bulletin for further details), or from U.S. educational information and advising centers. These centers may ask you to pay postage costs, and they may also have test preparation materials for the TOEFL available for reference use, loan, or purchase.

Content: The test uses a multiple choice and essay format to measure each examinee's ability to understand North American English. The test is divided into four sections: listening, structure, reading, and writing. The writing section requires the test taker to write an essay. TOEFL is a computer-adaptive test, which means that not all students answer exactly the same questions on the test. Instead, depending on how the student performs on each question, the computer determines whether the level of the next question should be easier or more difficult.

Scores: The total number of questions you answer correctly, together with your score on the essay, form the raw scores for each section. Raw scores are then converted to a scaled score for each section, which for the computer-based test ranges from 0 to 30. From these a total score is calculated, which ranges between 40 and 300 for the computer-based test. Each graduate department within a university decides for itself what score is acceptable. In general, colleges consider a total score of 250 or above to be excellent and a score below 173 to be inadequate. Most institutions require a score of between 213 and 250 (550 and 600 on the paper-based test) for admission to a graduate program. A few accept scores as low as 173 (500 on the paper-based test).

Graduate Admissions Tests

Most graduate departments require scores on at least one academic admissions test, either a general aptitude test such as the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test or a demonstration of proficiency in your field (GRE Subject Test), or sometimes both. The Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) is required almost without exception for applicants to business schools. The Miller Analogy Tests (MAT) may also be required in fields like education and psychology. These tests are in addition to an English language proficiency examination. They are sometimes referred to as standardized tests because all applicants are required to take the same tests (including U.S. applicants), allowing admissions officers to compare candidates by test score. See page 60 for a listing of general academic tests that may be required for admission. Professional schools such as schools of law, medicine, dentistry, and veterinary medicine have special examinations; see chapter 9, "Specialized Professional Study," for further information.

Usually, the faculty of each department within a university determines the requirements for various admissions

tests, as well as the weight given to the results. Consequently, there is no general rule to follow with respect to test requirements.

To find out if you need to take one or more of these tests, consult university catalogs and Web sites or look in university reference books that are available at U.S. educational information and advising centers. The reference books may also give the test score ranges of successful applicants to the various programs. There are no passing or failing scores on these examinations, but your score will have an effect on the overall competitiveness of your application.

Admissions tests are multiple-choice tests that require a high degree of English proficiency. Some also require mathematical skills or in-depth knowledge of content related to the field of study. It is important to note, however, that test scores are only one of the factors used in evaluating an international student's application. Admissions officers are aware that you may be taking the examinations in a language other than your native tongue, and they will take this into account.

In most parts of the world today, the GRE and GMAT are computer-adaptive tests. As with the TOEFL, this means that not all students will answer exactly the same questions on the test. Depending on how the student performs on each question, the computer will determine whether the student should be asked a harder or an easier question next. Test takers can view scores instantly when they finish the exam (with the exception of essay questions), and score reports are forwarded to university recipients within two to three weeks after the student has completed the test. In general, only very basic keyboard skills are required; however, tests including essay components require stronger typing skills. On the actual test day, time is allowed at the beginning for a brief tutorial on how to use a computer mouse in answering the questions.

You should plan to take the appropriate examinations one year prior to when you hope to start your graduate program. Contact your nearest information or advising center for registration and test preparation materials, and to obtain information about these examinations. Also visit the Educational Testing Service Web site at http://www.ets.org or contact the testing organization directly (see page 60) for further information. Remember that at busy times of the year you may not be able to take the test immediately; therefore, register well in advance. In particular, since the GRE subject tests are offered only two or three times each year, you must register to take the tests up to eight weeks in advance. Test scores can take several weeks to be mailed out, and it is essential that they reach universities before the application deadline date.

Time for a Recap

- To apply for a U.S. graduate degree program, you must have completed, or be near to completing, a first academic or professional degree, and you must have earned good grades.

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

- If you are applying for a teaching assistantship, some graduate departments may require you to take the Test of Spoken English (TSE).

- Many U.S. graduate degree programs require applicants to submit scores from a standardized admissions test, most commonly the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test for academic programs, and the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) for business programs. Some academ-

ic programs also require applicants to take a GRE Subject Test and/or the GRE Writing Assessment.

- Many of these tests are offered regularly at special test centers as computer-based tests, although GRE Subject Tests are still paper-based tests and are offered far less frequently than other admissions tests. Further information is available from U.S. educational information and advising centers or from the test administrators directly. Registration is often possible on the Internet.

- Students should register well ahead of the date they need to take the tests, and prepare for the tests at least one to two months in advance.

Useful Web Sites

Standardized Admissions Tests
http://www.ets.org
http://www.toefl.org
http://www.gre.org
http://www.gmat.org

Academic and English Examinations That May Be Required for Admission

Examination	Contact for Information
GMAT Graduate Management Admission Test	GMAT CN 6103 Princeton, NJ 08541-6103 USA http://www.gmat.org
GRE Graduate Record Examination	Educational Testing Service GRE Testing Program CN 6000 Princeton, NJ 08541-6000 USA http://www.gre.org
GRE Writing Assessment	Educational Testing Service c/o GRE Testing Program CN 6000 Princeton, NJ 08541-6000 USA
MAT Miller Analogy Tests	Psychological Corporation 7500 Old Oak Road Cleveland, Ohio 44130 USA http://www.tpcweb.com/mat/index.htm
TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language	TOEFL CN 6152 Princeton, NJ 08541-6152 USA http://www.toefl.org
TSE Test of Spoken English	c/o TOEFL CN 6152 Princeton, NJ 08541-6152 USA http://www.toefl.org

PREPARING SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

You should now have a short list of degree programs that match your needs, interests, and abilities. You should also feel confident that you have the minimum entrance requirements for studying in the United States, and that you can meet the costs of a U.S. graduate education. Now it's time to start putting together your applications. This chapter gives practical information and advice to help you prepare successful applications to the programs of your choice.

The Application Process

The entire application process, from obtaining initial information to applying for your student visa, should begin 12 to 18 months before you wish to start studying in the United States. See chapter 6 for a summary of the time frame for applying to U.S. universities to make sure you understand what you need to do and when. It may be possible to complete the process in less than 12 months, but late applicants usually find they have a much more limited choice of institutions, and even more limited chances of receiving financial assistance.

Having a good understanding of the U.S. educational system, starting early enough, and following the steps below will make the application process as simple as possible.

Requesting Application Materials

Because of the work, and the costs, involved in putting together a good application, most students limit their applications to between four and seven programs. However, you can request information from as many universities as you like, keeping in mind any postage costs and charges for university materials that you may have to pay. You may have a clear idea of exactly which schools you will be applying to and request information only from those. Or you may prefer to request information from 10 or more schools that you believe meet your needs, and then narrow down your list once you have read through the catalog, application form, and other information you receive.

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

If you do not have access to the Internet and need printed copies of application materials and catalogs, contact each university by writing a letter or by sending a fax or e-mail request separately to each school. Include the information detailed in the section below, "What to Include," in your written request. Or, you may prefer to submit a preliminary application form instead; contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center for copies of these forms.

Due to the cost of mailing to other countries, you may receive a shortened version of course listings, and you may be asked to pay if you require the entire catalog. Check to see if your information or advising center has copies of catalogs you need. If you do not receive, or cannot find, all the information you require, write or e-mail the school again and ask the specific questions you wish to have answered.

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

When to Send Your Inquiry

If you plan to apply to highly competitive institutions or to seek financial assistance, send your first inquiry 18 months before you plan to enroll. In other cases, send your first inquiry 12 months before you plan to enroll. Give yourself sufficient time for possible delays in international mail, especially if you are posting applications or requesting information in November or December when the high volume of holiday mail will often double the length of time mail takes to reach its destination. Be sure to send any letters by international airmail because surface mail can take several months to arrive.

Where to Send Your Inquiry

Address your inquiry to the Director of Graduate Admissions, using the address for the university given in the reference books. Send a separate inquiry to the Department Chair or Departmental Graduate Admissions Committee Chair requesting information about study and research in the department, and advise the

department that you have also been in touch with the Graduate Admissions Office of that school. Make sure you clearly write the name of the appropriate office or department on the envelope. Also be sure to include the full zip (postal) code for the institution on the envelope to ensure that your letter reaches its destination as quickly as possible. You may also send these inquiries by e-mail.

What to Include

If you wish to write or fax your request, carefully type or print all items. Always keep a copy of everything you send. Do not send any documents with the original inquiry; wait until you file a formal application. A letter or e-mail message should include the following:

- Your name, printed legibly or typed in exactly the same form and spelling each time, clearly indicating which of the names is the family name. In the United States, each person is identified primarily by a single family name or "last name," and it is customary to use only the father's family name as the son or daughter's family name. It is best to use your name as it appears on your passport.

- Your date of birth, printed or typed with the month first, then the day and year as it corresponds to the Gregorian calendar; for example, May 6, 1967, is 5/6/67. If a different calendar is used in your country, convert it to the Gregorian calendar. Be sure to always use the same birth date.

- Your mailing address. Make sure your return address is written clearly on the letter and on the envelope.

- Your citizenship and the country that has issued your passport.

- Your past and present education in chronological order, including technical programs, colleges, and universities or other institutions attended since secondary school, with examination results, grades, and rank in class, if known.

- The program of study you wish to apply for, using the exact wording that that institution uses for the program, as well as the month or term (fall or spring) and year in which you hope to begin studying in the United States.

- The total funds available to meet your educational and living expenses during each year of study in the United States, and the sources of these funds.

- Scores from English language proficiency tests and required admissions tests, if available, or dates on which you are registered to take these examinations.

- If you are not a native speaker of English, your number of years of English language study and where you studied.

These items will enable admissions officers to judge whether application at a particular level of study is suitable for you and to indicate your chances for admission. Sometimes schools or departments will require this, and possibly additional, information to be submitted in a more formal way as a preliminary application. Again, this allows the school to see if you are a suitable candidate for the program before you go through the whole application process.

If you have conducted thorough research to identify potentially suitable departments and programs, most or all of the institutions will respond by inviting you to submit a full, formal application for admission. They will send all the forms and instructions, and they may assign you a temporary, or processing, identification (I.D.) num-

ber. Be sure to use that number in all future correspondence with that institution.

Registering for the Admissions Tests

If you are planning to enroll at a university in September (fall semester), take any relevant tests no later than January in the same year, and preferably earlier. Find out whether you need to take the GRE General Test, a GRE Subject Test, the GRE Writing Assessment, the GMAT, or some other admissions test. (See chapter 4 for further information on these tests.)

If English is not your native language, register to take the TOEFL. (See chapter 4.) As with the academic admissions tests, make sure your test results reach universities before their deadline dates. If you believe that you qualify for a TOEFL waiver, contact universities directly and well in advance for further details. At least one to two months before the test dates, find out about test preparation materials and any other help you may need. Your U.S. educational information or advising center can give you further information.

Completing and Returning the Application Materials

> **"Try to arrange references and transcripts several months in advance of the deadline – it needs organization, especially in countries where these things work in a different way."**
>
> *– Literature student from Hungary*

Once you have received information from the universities, read everything thoroughly. Most schools require similar information but they may ask for it in different ways. You will usually be asked to provide the following items.

"Take your time and do a thorough job of filling in the forms. Take a break when you need one. Start early and mail them early!"

– Clinical psychology student from Ghana

Application Form

Your application form should be neat and clear to create a good impression. Unless it specifically asks you to complete the forms by hand, use a typewriter or word processor. You should fit your information into the application form provided and only use additional pages where necessary. Keep your personal information consistent and always spell your name the same way on all documents. This will help schools keep track of your application materials more easily. Remember that large U.S. universities handle thousands of student records annually.

Do not worry about providing a U.S. Social Security Number — either leave the section blank or write "none," according to instructions. Avoid abbreviations; it is better to write the names and addresses of your schools, employers, examinations, and awards in full. Always provide information about your education or employment experiences in a logical order that is either chronological or reverse chronological order, as required. You will also be asked when you want to start your studies and the degree you hope to receive. The information you receive from each institution should include a list of the exact majors and degree programs offered by that school. Be sure you list the major as stated in these materials.

Application Fee

Almost all universities charge a nonrefundable application fee that covers the cost of processing your application. It must be paid in U.S. dollars either by a dollar cashier's check drawn on a U.S. bank or by an international money order. These are obtainable from banks or American Express offices. Check the school's application form, Web site, or catalog for the current application fee and possible methods of payment. Be sure to submit the appropriate application fee with the application. If someone in the United States or elsewhere is

paying the fee for you, send the application to that person and ask that the fee and application be mailed together to the university.

Academic Credentials

Each university will specify the types of official records it requires to document past education. In American terms, these are called transcripts and include a list of courses that students have taken, when they were taken, and grades received for each course. Usually, the university will require your entire scholastic record from secondary school and/or university sources in a similar manner.

The U.S. school may furnish special forms on which authorities at your school are asked to write your grades and academic performance relative to other students in your institution. If such forms are not provided, your school still will be expected to submit official documents that provide this kind of information on university letterhead with the school stamp. If the admissions officer requests an explanation of the grading and class ranking system or descriptions of courses that you have taken, this information should be furnished by an official of your school or university, if possible.

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

As requested, send certified copies of the originals of diplomas, degrees, or professional titles, and copies of full records of your performance in any comprehensive examinations administered in your home country. U.S. admissions officers prefer that transcripts of previous educational work be sent with your application in an envelope sealed by your former school or sent directly from the school. 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 a public official authorized to certify such documents.

If English translations are necessary, you may use the services of a professional translator or translate the documents yourself. Such translations must also be certified by an acceptable agency. Some U.S. educational information and advising centers translate and certify documents to assist you with the application process. There may be a charge for such services. Do not attempt to convert your school results and courses into American terms. Instead, try to provide as much background information as possible on the grading system used and the types of degrees awarded.

Test Score Reporting

When you apply to take the GRE, GMAT, MAT, TOEFL, or other examinations, you should know which universities you wish to apply to. In this way, you will be able to specify at that time that you wish your scores sent to those universities. You will save time and money by sending the scores at test time rather than requesting separate scores at a later date. When you submit an application, also include a photocopy of your test score reports, if possible. The admissions office can more easily match the official scores with your application and, in some instances, they may begin processing your application with only the photocopy.

"Think about what you want to achieve in the U.S. – you can be sure that each college will ask you this question and a well thought out answer is critical."

— M.B.A. student from the United Kingdom

Personal Statement or Statement of Purpose

Almost all graduate programs ask applicants to submit a personal statement, or statement of purpose, as part of the application process. The personal statement gives universities a chance to get a glimpse of you as an individual, an insight that is not possible in the grades and

numbers that make up the rest of your application. The goal is to write a clear, concise, and persuasive statement that sincerely reflects your views and aspirations. The admissions committee that reviews applications wants to see if there is a good match between you and the department or school and whether the degree program can meet your needs.

> **"It is important that your dedication to your field resonates in your application. Be sure and explain any academic difficulties you might have experienced and what you did to correct them. Extracurricular activities give the admissions committee an idea as to the type of person that you are."**
>
> *— Medical student from Ghana*

The statement of purpose is an important part of the application, and it is essential that you write the best statement possible. It is an opportunity for you to distinguish yourself from other applicants. The personal statement is not meant to be an autobiography in chronological order; instead, use your imagination to come up with an interesting format and content that will maintain the reader's interest.

Four important questions should be answered in the statement of purpose:

- Why do you wish to pursue a graduate degree, and why now? The university often will ask about your career goals and how they relate to your past experiences and your decision to apply for graduate study.

- What are your academic or research interests? The admissions committee will be looking for a good match between you and the department to ensure that they can satisfy your interests. They are also look-

ing for a demonstration of intellectual maturity and understanding of your field.

- Why are you applying to this particular institution and degree program? Tailor each statement of purpose to the specific program and institution, including, if possible, references to professors you wish to work with, courses you wish to take, and unique facilities available at the institution. Admissions officers want to see that you have done careful research about their program and that you are a serious candidate.

- What can you contribute to the department or program in terms of your background, abilities, or other special qualities and interests? Discuss any relevant past experiences and achievements, as well as any special qualities you feel you can bring to the program, such as your international perspective.

Some general tips:

- Make sure you answer the question that has been asked. Once you have done an outline for a statement, go back and check that it answers the question, then do the same with each draft of your essay.

- Stick to the word limit given. If a limit is not given, keep the statement to two or three sides of paper, typed or word processed, and double-spaced.

- Make sure that your statement is a true representation of yourself and your abilities — it is important that the essay be genuine and honest.

- Admissions officers read many essays. Since some programs are extremely competitive, try to have an interesting first sentence that grabs the reader's attention and makes the essay more memorable.

"Remain truthful not just because it is ethical, but because it is powerful."

– Management Information Systems student from India

- Address any obvious gaps or weak points in your application either in a separate cover note or in the application essay, but always keep the explanation positive. For example, state what you learned from a difficult experience and how it has made you a better student.

- Get someone you trust to proofread each statement of purpose for grammatical and spelling errors. Make sure statements are clear, interesting, and logically organized. The personal statement is an important demonstration of your written communication skills.

Recommendations

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

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

You will usually be asked for at least two recommendations. Your recommenders (or references or referees) must be able to write about your work and be able to assess your potential to do well in graduate school. Ideally, they should be written by professors who have taught you in the past, if you are applying for an academic degree program; however, if you are not a recent graduate, one recommendation can be from an employer. For professional programs, references from employers and professors are acceptable.

Some universities send recommendation forms with the application; if so, ask your recommenders to use these forms and to follow the instructions printed on them. If there are no specific instructions, ask three or four professors, administrators, or employers who know you well to type letters on their own letterhead in English, and either place them in a sealed envelope for you to send with your application or send them directly to the university.

Recommendations should include:

- a statement about the type and amount of experience they have with your academic work or employment;
- an estimate of how your work compares with others in the same field with whom they have experience;
- an assessment of your particular strengths;
- your rank in their class, department, or university, if they know it;
- an assessment of your research experience and ability, if known.

U.S. universities expect letters of recommendation to emphasize a student's positive qualities and to be longer and more detailed than might be customary in your home country. It is important to understand these cultural differences when choosing your recommenders. Poorly written, negative, or late recommendations will reflect on your judgment in picking referees. Recommendation forms may ask a list of questions or just one general question. Since recommendations carry considerable weight in the admissions process, take the time to brief your recommenders about your plans, where you would like to study, and why.

A recommendation form may include a waiver where you can relinquish your right to see what is written about you. If this option is offered, most admissions officers prefer you to waive your right so that recommenders may feel more comfortable when writing their evaluations. Admissions officers usually interpret waived recommendations as more honest. If your recommendations must be sent directly from your referees, it is common courtesy to give them stamped, addressed envelopes. Also allow plenty of time for your referees to write their recommendations. Remind them to sign the sealed flap of each envelope before mailing it to an institution. Check back with your recommenders to confirm that the reference forms have actually been sent to the United States.

Financial Statement

Most universities include a form called a Declaration and Certification of Finances or Affidavit of Financial Support in their application packets. This document must be signed by whomever is meeting your university expenses. It may also have to be certified by a bank or lawyer. Keep a copy of this form since you may also need it to apply for your student visa. Schools usually need to know that you have sufficient funds to cover at least the first year's expenses, although many may also ask you to indicate your source of income for the entire period of study. If you know when you apply that you will need some form of assistance from the university or other sources, such as scholarship programs, indicate how much you plan to request or apply for. Please note, however, that the university will issue the relevant certificate of eligibility for a student visa only if you are able to document fully your source(s) of income.

Some academic departments or schools operate a policy whereby your application for admission will be considered first, and then they will consider your need for financial aid. Other schools and departments that have limited or no financial aid available for their students will give higher priority to applicants who do not need financial support from the university.

Deadlines and Submission

Each graduate department within a university sets its own deadline date, and it is usually firm about not accepting applications after that time, particularly if a program is very popular. For the fall semester, which begins in late August or early September, deadlines are usually between January and March, although they can be as early as November or as late as June or July. If, however, an institution indicates that it operates "rolling admissions," late applicants may still have a fair chance

of acceptance. In this case, a university will admit and reject candidates until the program is filled. It is nonetheless a good idea to submit your application as early as possible.

Some universities accept enrollment for any of their terms, although many institutions prefer to enroll graduate students for the fall term. For schools that operate on a semester calendar, midyear admission is some time in January. Universities that use the quarter system (three terms) may offer admission both in the winter term (January) and the spring term (March). The precise date differs for each institution. Deadlines for midyear admissions are usually six to nine months in advance of enrollment. If you are applying for admission in January, take any admissions tests at least six months beforehand.

It is your responsibility to ensure that all documents, application forms, references, and official test score reports reach the universities safely and on time. Often the closing date for students from other countries is earlier than for U.S. students. Usually applications for scholarships or fellowships must be submitted earlier than applications for admission.

If at all possible, send all required documents together in one envelope, including certified academic credentials and letters of recommendation that have been placed in sealed envelopes. (Some institutions require that all materials arrive together.) Attach a note to any documents that bear a different name or different spelling from the standard one that you are using, and give the same first, second, and family name you used on your application form. Again, use the name on your passport if possible.

Send your application by registered mail or by courier, or submit the electronic application and mail all support-

ing documents. Keep copies of your application and documents just in case your material gets lost in the mail; you will be relieved to know that you can supply another set of information quickly, if this should happen.

After you have submitted all required documents, you should confirm with the university that your application is complete. Allow a reasonable amount of time before following up, probably three to four weeks after submission of the documents. Do not correspond too often. Remember that the admissions office is trying to process a large number of applications, and the more correspondence it has to answer, the slower the application process. Allow at least six to eight weeks after completion of the application for a decision to be made. Some programs and institutions may take as long as three to four months, and many institutions review all completed applications at the same time and issue acceptances between March and May.

Throughout the application process, do your best to comply with instructions. If some procedure is impossible for you to complete or some document is lost or cannot be obtained, state the situation in a letter and send it to the school along with a letter from the relevant authorities who can support or authenticate your problem. Sometimes accommodations will be made for difficult circumstances.

The Admissions Process

No uniform procedure exists for graduate admissions in the United States. The graduate admissions office almost always shares the responsibility for admissions with the academic departments, and most commonly there is a graduate admissions committee for each department made up of faculty members and graduate admissions office staff. However, the roles and the relative authority of the graduate admissions office and the academic

departments, as well as the relationship between them, vary markedly from institution to institution. To make your admissions experience more positive, it is a good idea from the beginning of the process to network with both the graduate admissions office and your specific department of interest. Develop a clear understanding of the institution's general admission requirements and the department's academic and research objectives to see if they match your personal and professional goals.

In addition to the match between the strength of your application and the admissions standard of a school or department, two other factors may influence your chances of admission. First, graduate student research may be highly specialized and dependent on the availability of a faculty member who shares a student's interest, and on resources available in the department. A department may suggest that you be admitted because your research interests match well with those of a particular faculty member, or may advise against admission because faculty members and resources for your research are lacking. Secondly, since faculty members review applications to decide who should receive any available research or teaching assistantships, departments often look for applicants who can teach or do research in particular areas.

Interviews

It is rare that U.S. universities are able to interview candidates outside the United States, although business schools or other professional programs occasionally send admissions officers on international recruitment trips to conduct interviews with applicants. International students are not at a disadvantage because they are unable to be interviewed. However, if you are offered the chance to have an interview in your country, or if you can visit a campus in the United States, do not refuse the opportunity; it is a good way to learn more about the school and ask any questions you may have.

Acceptance

If you plan to begin studies in September, you should hear from the universities you applied to by mid-April of that year. They will probably put a limitation on how long they will keep the place open for you, and may ask you to send a deposit if you wish to accept their offer. If you receive more than one offer of acceptance, write to the universities you turn down so that they can make offers to those students still on waiting lists. It is also recommended that you return unused student visa Certificates of Eligibility to those schools. Universities usually send information on housing, health insurance, and orientation at this point.

Time for a Recap

- No uniform procedure exists for graduate admissions in the United States. The admissions process may vary between universities, and from department to department within a particular university.

- Start the application process 12 to 18 months ahead of when you wish to start your studies in the United States.

- Request application materials from at least 10 universities that interest you. Write to both the graduate admissions office and the academic department. Provide sufficient information about yourself to allow the university to decide whether you are a suitable candidate for the program.

- Read university responses carefully. Identify four to seven institutions that best meet your needs and to which you have a good chance of admission.

- Work back from the university application deadlines to identify when you need to take admissions tests.

- Allow plenty of time to prepare for tests, to write personal statements tailored to each university, to request official transcripts from your undergraduate institution(s), and to brief your referees fully.

- Make sure your applications are complete and include the correct application fee in U.S. dollars. Make copies before sending applications to the United States.

- Well before the deadline, send applications to the universities by courier or registered airmail, or complete and submit the electronic application and mail supporting documents. Check with each institution that every part of the application has been received.

- By May, expect to hear whether you have been accepted, put on a waiting list, or rejected.

- Send a letter of acceptance to the institution you wish to attend and send letters of regret to those you turn down. Return any official documents to institutions that you will not attend.

Useful Web Sites

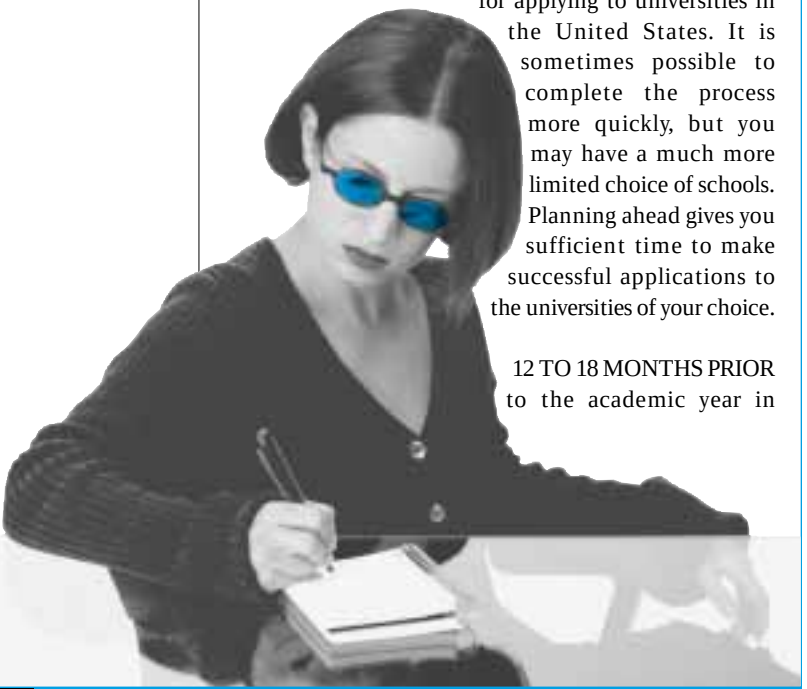
Many college search sites include tips for preparing successful applications:
http://www.collegenet.com
http://www.educationconnect.com
http://www.embark.com
http://www.petersons.com
http://www.studyusa.com

Admissions Tests
See chapter 4

Credential Evaluation
http://www.naces.org

THE APPLICATION PROCESS: A TIMETABLE AND CHECKLIST

Below is the recommended timetable for applying to universities in the United States. It is sometimes possible to complete the process more quickly, but you may have a much more limited choice of schools. Planning ahead gives you sufficient time to make successful applications to the universities of your choice.



12 TO 18 MONTHS PRIOR to the academic year in

which you hope to enroll, begin to consider, research, and do the following:

- What are your reasons for wanting to study in the United States?
- Which universities offer your subject and specialization?
- Will you need financial assistance?
- Begin narrowing down your choices of schools to approximately 10 to 20 institutions, and make sure they meet your academic, financial, lifestyle, and other needs.
- Find out application deadlines. This will affect when you take the standardized tests required for admission since test results must reach admissions offices no later than these deadlines. The tests should be taken in advance of submitting university application forms.
- Register to take paper-based GRE Subject Tests if required by the universities to which you are applying.

12 MONTHS PRIOR to enrollment, start to complete the following (months indicated are estimates):

August

- Contact universities for application and financial aid forms and catalogs.
- Register to take the TOEFL and the GRE General Test, GRE Writing Assessment, GMAT, or other admissions tests, as necessary.

September — December

- Request official transcripts from your undergraduate institution.
- Brief your recommenders and request letters of reference from them.
- Draft personal statements or statements of purpose and research proposals, if requested.
- Submit completed application forms (for admission as well as financial aid).

- Double check that transcripts and references have been sent.
- Take the necessary admissions tests.

January — March

- University application deadlines must be met.

April — June

- Letters of acceptance or rejection arrive. Decide which university to attend, notify the admissions office of your decision, complete and return any forms they require.
- Send letters of regret to those universities you turn down.
- Organize finances (arrange to transfer funds to a U.S. bank; make sure you have funds for travel and expenses on arrival).
- Finalize arrangements for housing and medical insurance with your university.
- Notify any sponsoring organizations of your plans.

June — August

- Contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center to let them know that you have been accepted to a U.S. institution. (See "Getting Ready to Go," below.)
- Apply to your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for a visa upon receipt of your Certificate of Eligibility and well in advance of your departure date. (See chapter 7, "Applying for a Student Visa.")
- Make travel arrangements, planning to arrive in time for the university's orientation program.
- Contact the International Student Office at your university with details of your arrival plans, and confirm details of any orientation for new students held by the university.

Getting Ready to Go

Once you know that you are going to study in the United States, you will probably have many questions

about visas, accommodations, health insurance, banking, how to study, and other "predeparture" information. See chapter 9 in this booklet for further information, and refer to Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*, located on the World Wide Web at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

Most U.S. educational information and advising centers conduct predeparture orientation presentations in the summer, and some may also offer sessions midyear. Contact your nearest center for their schedule and to reserve space for these popular events. Some centers may charge a fee for this service.

APPLYING FOR A STUDENT VISA

Congratulations — you have been accepted by the university of your choice! You are thinking about the courses you will take, the people you will meet, and the exciting experiences that lie ahead, but now you face one final task: applying for your student visa.

Visa Types

It is important to understand the differences between the types of visas available to students before you apply for yours. The F-1 visa category is the most common student visa type and is designated for undergraduate and graduate students in academic and language study programs. The J-1 category is for graduate or exchange students, teachers, scholars, and researchers who come to the United States under educational exchange programs such as the Fulbright Program. J-1 students must be financed, at least partially, either by the U.S. government or their home government, or by the U.S. institution that they will attend. They may also be part of an exchange program.

One advantage of the J-1 visa for married students is that it allows spouses (J-2 dependents) to apply for work authorization after they arrive in the United States. The F-1 does not allow F-2 dependents to work. F-2 or J-2 dependents may study full-time or part-time.

Your tax obligations to the United States government should not be affected by your choice of either the F-1 or J-1 visa. However, you may find some differences in health insurance requirements. Also, if you are traveling on a J-1 visa, a "two-year rule" may apply. This means that after you have finished your studies, you will be required to spend two years back in your home country before you can become eligible for immigrant status in the United States, or for long-term employment as a nonimmigrant.

For more details on F-1 and J-1 visas, contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center, or check with the International Student Office at your U.S. institution.

Procedures for Your Country

Procedures and requirements for applying for a student visa are more complex and demanding owing to enhanced U.S. border security. They vary from country to country. There are a number of places where you can obtain information on the visa application process in general and the specific requirements for your country:

- U.S. educational information and advising centers will be able to give you information on the application procedures for your country. If at all possible, attend one of their predeparture orientation programs; it will almost certainly include information on applying for a visa. Some centers may also produce written predeparture materials.

- U.S. embassies and consulates can provide application forms and specific details of the application procedure. They often have telephone information lines and Web sites that provide this information.

- Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United*

States, covers the visa application in more detail. It is available on the U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://educationusa.state.gov

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

- start the process as soon as possible. Consulates encourage early applications;
- assemble all the documentation that can help make your case;
- make sure you are well-prepared if you are required to attend an interview.

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

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

To apply for a student visa, you must have a valid Certificate of Eligibility: Form I-20 A-B for an F-1 visa, and Form DS-2019 for a J-1 visa. Your U.S. university will send you the appropriate form after you have been admitted and you have certified your finances. The university enters your name into SEVIS -- the Student and Exchange Information System. Check the form:

- Is your name spelled correctly and in the same form as it appears on your passport?
- Is the other information — date and country of birth, degree program, reporting date, completion date, and financial information — correct?
- Is the form signed by a university official?
- Has the reporting date ("student must report no later

than…") passed? If so, the form has expired. It cannot be used after the reporting date.

If your I-20 or DS-2019 is valid, you are ready to apply for the visa. If not, you should contact the university.

If you are required to attend a visa interview, be aware that they usually last an average of three minutes; therefore, you must be prepared to be brief yet convincing. Be confident, do not hide the truth or lie — U.S. consular section staff are required by law to begin with the assumption that you might intend harm, or be untruthful, so do not take offense.

To issue your visa, the consular officer must be satisfied on three counts:

- First, are you a bona fide student? The officer will look at your educational background and plans to assess how likely you are to enroll and remain in the program. If you are required to have an interview, be prepared to discuss the reasons you chose a particular university, your subject, and your career plans. Bring your transcripts, degree certificate, standardized test scores, and anything else that demonstrates your academic commitment.

- Second, are you capable of financing your education, your living expenses, and the expenses of any dependents who may be traveling with you? The U.S. government needs assurances that you will not drop out of school or take a job illegally. Your I-20 A-B or DS-2019 form will list how you have shown the university you will cover your expenses (and those of any family members who will accompany you), at least for the first year. Provide solid evidence of any scholarships, grants, or loans you have been awarded, and of your sponsor's finances, especially sources and amounts of income.

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

Overall, you must be able to show that your reasons for returning home are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. The law states that you must demonstrate sufficient economic, family, and social ties to your place of residence to ensure that your stay in the United States will be temporary.

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

For family and social ties, the consular officer may ask how many close family members live in your home country, compared to how many live in the United States. What community activities have you participated in that demonstrate a sincere connection to your town or country? What leadership, sports, work, or academic experience indicates that you are someone who wants to come home and contribute your part?

Visa Refusals

If your application is refused, the consular officer is required to give you an explanation in writing. However, this is often a standardized reply and is unlikely to go

into the details of your specific case. You do have the right to apply a second time, but if you reapply, make sure to prepare much more carefully; the consular officer will need to see fresh evidence sufficient to overcome the reasons for the first denial.

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

Time for a Recap

- Most students enter the United States on an F-1 visa, but some graduate students may travel on a J-1 visa. For more detailed information on the differences between the F and J visas, contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center or the International Student Office at your U.S. university.

- You must familiarize yourself with the visa application requirements for your country and prepare your application thoroughly well in advance.

- Before applying for a student visa, check that the I-20 A-B form for an F-1 visa (or DS-2019 form for a J-1 visa) that you received from your university is valid.

- Once you are accepted, contact your information or advising center to register for a predeparture orientation presentation and to find out more about local visa application procedures.

- Make sure you can demonstrate to the consular officer that you are a bona fide student, that you can finance your education, and that you have strong ties to your home country.

- If your application is refused, you can apply again, but you must provide fresh evidence to overcome the reason for the first refusal.

Useful Web Sites

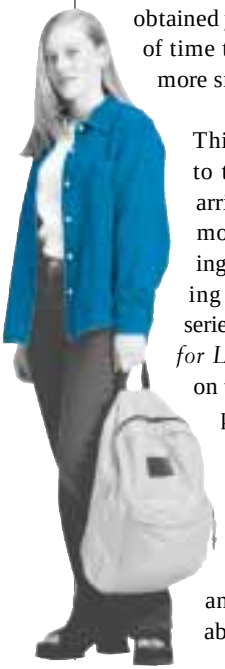
http://www.UnitedStatesVisa.gov
http://www.travel.state.gov/visa_services.html

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY LIFE

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

– Law student from the United Kingdom

Once you have secured your place at a U.S. university, it is time to begin making plans for your new life as an international student in the United States. Although there are a few things you cannot do until you have obtained your visa, much planning can be done ahead of time to make the move to the United States run more smoothly.



This chapter highlights a few of the main areas to think about and what to expect when you arrive in the United States. You should obtain more detailed predeparture advice by contacting your U.S. educational information or advising center or consulting Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*, on the U.S. Department of State's Web site (see page 95).

Arrival in the United States

Once you have been admitted to a university and have notified them of your acceptance, you should receive further information about your new school and procedures for your

arrival on campus. These should include details of the best way to reach the campus. Plan to arrive on a weekday, if possible, when the school's administrative offices are open and campus activities are in full swing. Notify the U.S. institution if you are traveling with dependents, and be sure to ask about married student housing, day care facilities, activities for spouses, schooling for your children, and any other questions that may be important to you and your family.

"Take souvenirs from your home country as there are always occasions to talk about your country. Also take pictures of family members and friends as sometimes you really need to talk to them!"

– Public administration student from Armenia

Orientation

U.S. universities hold arrival orientations for new international students to familiarize them with the campus and its facilities and to help with adjustment to life in the United States. The orientation lasts up to one week and may be compulsory or optional, but you are strongly advised to attend. It will cover a variety of useful topics: how to use the library, health center, and other university facilities; academic regulations, expectations, and support services; how to register for classes; U.S. culture and social life, culture shock, and adjusting to life in the United States; local services, visa and legal regulations, and so on. All of this information will help you integrate more easily into life as a student in the United States. At the orientation you will also get to know other international students on campus and the staff who handle any matters relating to international students at the university — usually known as international student advisers (see below).

International Student Adviser (ISA)

U.S. universities that regularly admit international students have special staff assigned and trained to work with them. They are usually called international student advisers (ISAs) or foreign student advisers (FSAs). You can go to these staff members to ask any questions related to your status as an international student. They also

are there to help if you have any problems or concerns. Throughout the year, they and the International Student Office usually organize social and cultural events for international students and their families.

University Housing

When an applicant is accepted for admission, the university housing office should automatically send out information about what housing is available on campus for graduate students and how to apply for it. Most universities have accommodations for graduate students, including some for married students, though the latter is often limited. Schools may place you on a waiting list for on-campus family housing until space becomes available. It is recommended that you inquire well in advance and compare the costs of living on or off campus to make the best decisions for you and your family.

If you have not arranged housing in advance, or if you prefer living off campus in the local community, you will need to arrive at the university several weeks ahead of the start of the term. The closer to the start of the term you begin looking for housing, the more limited your options will be.

Money and Banking

The United States has very few national banks and most operate on a regional, state, or city basis. Some universities have their own credit unions or other banking services. Before opening an account, find out which banks are near to where you will be living and studying. It may also be hard to open an account from overseas. Make sure you bring enough money with you to live on until you can open an account and arrange for funds to be transferred from home.

Health Insurance

As an international student you must have health insurance coverage while in the United States. It is compulsory to take out health insurance at most U.S. universities, either through the university's policy or by purchasing your own policy that meets the university's requirements. Since health insurance policies vary, your international student adviser can explain them to you and help you decide on the best policy for you. Don't forget to make sure you are insured for the journey from your home country to your campus in the United States.

Social Life

A variety of organizations and activities await you on most campuses, and getting involved is a great way to meet new friends, including Americans. You may find student-run radio and TV stations, newspapers, sports teams, and social clubs that are looking for new members. U.S. universities usually have an international society too. Most campuses have a Student Activities Office that can tell you what is happening on campus. A lot of information is also available on university Web sites.

Time for a Recap

- Once you have accepted the offer of a place at a U.S. university, make sure you are properly prepared for your move to the United States.

- Contact the university to confirm details of the orientation for international students, making sure you will arrive in time to attend. Inquire about health insurance requirements.

- Make arrangements for accommodation, and plan to arrive in plenty of time if you need to find family or off-campus housing.

- Ensure you will have enough funds available to last until you can set up a bank account in the United States and transfer funds from home.

- Check out the social, sports, and other facilities available on campus and identify activities in which you would like to get involved.

Useful Web Sites

If You Want to Study in the United States, Booklet Four — *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa/.

SPECIALIZED PROFESSIONAL STUDY

The path for study and entry into many professions in the United States differs substantially from the process in most other parts of the world. This chapter gives an overview of study requirements for dentistry, medicine, nursing, veterinary medicine, and law. More details about these professions, as well as information on other fields with special requirements, can be found at U.S. educational information and advising centers and in the bibliography at the end of this booklet.

Dentistry

In the United States, dental study usually begins after four years of undergraduate study. Universities do not have undergraduate programs in dentistry; students planning to study dentistry can major in any subject, but should have a minimum number of prerequisite undergraduate courses in the biological sciences, chemistry, physics, and mathematics, as well as in the humanities and the behavioral and social sciences.

First Professional Degree

The first professional degree in dentistry, titled either the doctor of dental surgery (D.D.S.) or the doctor of dental medicine (D.M.D.) degree, requires four years of

study — two years emphasizing the basic medical sciences, and two years providing a clinical orientation. To practice, graduates must also meet requirements of the state in which they plan to see patients, including satisfactory scores on the National Board Dental Examination and a state clinical examination.

Admission to a U.S. dental school is highly competitive, with about twice as many applicants as positions available. Although anyone is eligible to apply, foreign nationals rarely gain admission to a U.S. school of dentistry without having completed at least two years of postsecondary study at a U.S. institution. In one recent year, out of 4,268 first-year dental students, 342 were foreign nationals. Chances of obtaining admission to private dental schools are somewhat higher than those of admission to state-supported dental schools, because public institutions generally give admissions preference to the state residents whose taxes support their programs. The American Association of Dental Schools (Web site at http://www.aads.jhu.org) publishes an annual guide to dental schools that includes useful information and statistics on admission requirements. Your U.S. educational information or advising center may have this resource and other reference material to help you get information on particular schools and evaluate your qualifications.

Application requirements for dental school include a strong undergraduate academic record, proficiency in the English language, and a score on the Dental Admission Test (DAT) judged satisfactory by the individual dental school. The DAT examines proficiency in mathematics, biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, reading, and perceptual motor abilities. It is regularly offered in the United States. Occasionally, it can be scheduled in other countries — a U.S. admissions officer or predental adviser must request such administration at least three months before a scheduled test date. For further information, contact the Dental Admission Testing Pro-

gram, Department of Testing Services, American Dental Association, 211 East Chicago Avenue, Suite 1846, Chicago, IL 60611-2678, USA; Telephone: 312-440-2689, extension 2689; E-mail: education@ada.org.

Postgraduate Training

After receiving the D.D.S. or equivalent, dentists may apply for postgraduate training at hospitals or dental schools. Some programs lead to a master's degree, and doctoral study may also be available. These degree programs typically prepare graduates for teaching or research careers.

A university or a hospital may sponsor non-degree residency programs with a clinical focus. General practice residencies are highly competitive, and typically only about 4 percent of the students enrolled are foreign nationals. Specialty residencies tend to admit a considerably larger proportion of internationally educated dentists. These residencies offer training in dental public health, endodontics, oral and maxillofacial pathology, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics, or prosthodontics.

No one process exists to qualify internationally trained dentists seeking to study in the United States. One common requirement is that applicants must pass one or both parts of the National Board Dental Examination. Some specialty areas, such as oral surgery and periodontics, require that dentists complete at least the last two years of professional study at a U.S. university and earn a first professional degree at a dental school accredited by the American Dental Association. (About half of U.S. dental schools offer admission at an advanced level for internationally educated dentists wishing to complete a U.S. first professional degree.) State licensure and national board certification may also be required in some cases.

Dental schools are more likely than hospitals to consider international applicants who do not have a U.S. license.

Short-term Educational Opportunities

Dental schools and hospitals frequently offer postgraduate continuing education courses lasting from a few days to a few weeks. These courses provide updates on specific topics and are open to international dentists. A few schools will arrange special programs for visiting internationally-educated dentists.

Medicine

In the United States, medical study generally follows completion of a bachelor's degree. Admission to medical study is very competitive. Less than half of U.S. citizen applicants are accepted to medical school, and typically less than 3 percent of international applicants are accepted. In one recent year only 155 of the 16,221 students who entered medical school were foreign nationals, and most of them were individuals who had completed their undergraduate education in the United States. Because medical schools, particularly public medical schools, are funded largely by taxes raised in the states where they are located, admissions preference is usually given to residents of that state. Some state-supported schools will consider only U.S. citizens and permanent residents for admission.

First Professional Degree

Medical school usually lasts four years and students graduate with the Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree. Study combines classroom experience with observation and clinical work. Admission requirements include an undergraduate degree, preferably from a U.S.-accredited institution. Degrees in almost any discipline are acceptable as long as the student's course load includes the required

minimum number of prerequisite courses in the biological sciences, chemistry, mathematics, behavioral and social sciences, and humanities. Additional requirements include an excellent undergraduate academic record; fluency in English; extracurricular activities such as work experience and volunteer commitments; and a satisfactory score on the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), a standardized entrance examination administered around the world on computer. More information on the MCAT can be found by contacting the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) at http://www.aamc.org/stuapps/admiss/mcat/start.htm or the American College Testing Program, MCAT Program Office, P.O. Box 4056, Iowa City, IA 52243, USA; Telephone: 319-337-1356; Fax: 319-337-1122.

Students interested in studying toward an M.D. degree should carefully consider the level of difficulty of entrance requirements, length of time involved (four years of undergraduate study plus another four years of medical school), and recognition of a U.S. medical degree and licensing qualifications in their home country to determine if medical study is appropriate for them. The Association of American Medical Colleges (Web site at http://www.aamc.org) publishes an annual guide to medical schools that includes useful information and statistics on admission requirements. Your U.S. educational information or advising center may have this resource and other reference material to help you get information on particular schools and evaluate your qualifications.

Postgraduate Training

Many foreign nationals who receive their first degree in medicine (M.D.) in their home country choose to continue their graduate medical education in the United States. To be eligible to practice medicine in the United States, all physicians, regardless of whether they were educated in the United States or outside the United States, must:

- receive the first professional medical degree from a medical school accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education;
- complete a period of residency or graduate medical education;
- pass state licensure examinations.

Obtaining ECFMG Certification

U.S. graduate training for physicians generally involves completing a prescribed period of clinical training in a chosen medical specialty, usually called a residency. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) accredits such programs. While entry to residencies is quite competitive, international physicians have better chances to pursue U.S. study at this level than at the first professional level.

To obtain residency positions or other training involving patient contact, graduates of medical schools outside the United States must pass a certification program administered by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG). This certification program is designed to assure both the U.S. public and directors of residency programs that applicants from foreign medical schools have qualifications comparable to U.S. medical school graduates. All graduates of medical schools outside the United States and Canada (including U.S. citizens who have graduated from medical schools not accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education) must meet ECFMG certification requirements.

For ECFMG certification, you will have to:

- Submit documents showing graduation from a medical school listed at the time of graduation in the then-current edition of the World Directory of Medical Colleges.

- Submit documents showing completion of all educational requirements to practice medicine in the country where your medical education was completed. Physicians who are nationals of the country where they were educated must also have a license to practice medicine in that country.

- Pass both the basic medical science (Step 1) and clinical science (Step 2) sections of the U.S. Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE). These are computer-based examinations administered at testing centers worldwide. Further information is available from information and advising centers or from the USMLE Web site at http://www.usmle.org.

- Pass the Clinical Skills Assessment (CSA), which is a test evaluating spoken English ability and clinical proficiency. The CSA is currently administered at the ECFMG Clinical Skills Assessment Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the United States. Physicians are eligible to take the CSA only when they have completed all other ECFMG testing requirements successfully.

- Achieve an acceptable score on the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), which is a computer-based English language proficiency test administered at testing centers worldwide. Further information is available from information and advising centers or from the TOEFL Web site at http://www.toefl.org.

ECFMG can provide an information booklet, updated annually, that contains further details on the certification process. Contact the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates, 3624 Market Street, 4th floor, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2685, USA; Telephone: 215-386-5900; Fax: 215-387-9963; Web site: http://www.ecfmg.org.

In addition to ECFMG certification, some states require

that foreign medical graduates pass a third medical licensing examination, the USMLE Step 3, prior to taking part in a residency. This test is administered only in the United States.

Locating a Residency

ECFMG certification does not guarantee placement in a residency program. Indeed, in some years, only small percentages of international medical graduates who gained ECFMG certification have been placed in residency positions.

International medical graduates applying for residencies must have ECFMG certification before beginning a residency, but they may initiate correspondence with a program before they receive certification. Information on residency programs can be found on-line in the American Medical Association's (AMA) Fellowship and Residency Electronic Interactive Database (FREIDA), located at http://www.ama-assn.org/cgi-bin/freida/freida.cgi. Information is also published by the AMA in print and on CD-ROM annually as the Directory of Graduate Medical Education. Many information and advising centers have a copy of this book, or an order form may be requested from the AMA, Order Dept. OP416798, P.O. Box 7046, Dover, DE 19903-7046, USA; Fax: 312-464-5600.

When corresponding with residency programs, be sure to obtain information on such issues as salary, length of appointment, elements of the program, hours of duty and responsibilities, and provision of health and professional liability insurance.

Application must be made to individual programs, and, in addition, applicants must generally participate in the National Resident Matching Program (NRMP) or one of several other computerized application programs in which residency programs in particular specialties par-

ticipate. An increasing number of medical specialties are requiring use of the Electronic Residency Application System (ERAS), administered for international medical graduates by ECFMG. To receive an ERAS application form, applicants should contact the ECFMG ERAS Program, P.O. Box 13467, Philadelphia, PA 19101-3467, USA; E-mail: erashelp@ecfmg.org; Telephone: 215-386-5900; Fax: 215-222-5641.

To take part in the NRMP, physicians must pass all ECFMG examinations by January 1 of the year in which they plan to enter the residency. The NRMP allows each applicant to submit a list of their preferred residencies, which are then matched with the preferences submitted by residency programs. For further information, see ECFMG's bulletin, or contact the NRMP, 2501 M Street, N.W., Suite One, Washington, DC 20037-1307, USA; Telephone: 202-828-0566; Web site: http://www.aamc.org/nrmp.

ECFMG-certified foreign physicians who are matched with residency positions usually are eligible to receive sponsorship from the ECFMG for exchange visitor (J-1) visas. The period for which J-1 status is valid varies with the medical specialty chosen, with each specialty board determining the appropriate length of time for graduate clinical training in that specialty. After completion of the stipulated training period, exchange visitor physicians must leave the United States. They are not eligible to petition to apply to return to the United States in immigrant, temporary worker, or trainee status, or as an intra-company transferee, until they have resided in their home country, or country of last permanent residence, for two years.

Some Alternatives Not Requiring ECFMG Certification

Graduate Academic Education: Foreign medical graduates can apply directly to graduate academic programs

in medically related fields that do not involve patient care. Such programs do not require ECFMG certification. Application procedures are similar to those for graduate programs in non-medical fields. A few examples of medically related fields of study include radiology, immunology, molecular biology, genetics, neuroscience, pathology, and physiology. Foreign medical graduates may also apply for research grants in the health sciences. Hospitals, universities, and independent research centers are possible sites for research.

Short-term Opportunities: Medical centers, hospitals, and medical associations frequently offer conferences or short-term courses, lasting from a few days to a few weeks to, occasionally, several months. Such opportunities are open to foreign medical graduates without ECFMG certification as long as they do not involve direct patient contact. Some medical centers, particularly larger research and teaching institutions, may also be able to arrange individual training for international physicians on request. Such exchanges, again, cannot involve direct patient contact but they can provide valuable opportunities for consultation, observation, and comparison of facilities. There are specific offices, called by a variety of names, including International Services, at some medical centers that arrange such visits. Visits may also be arranged directly with U.S. colleagues.

ECFMG International Fellowships in Medical Education: This program is sponsored by the Foundation for Advancement of International Medical Education and Research (FAIMER), a nonprofit foundation under the aegis of ECFMG. Through FAIMERSM, the IFME provides opportunies for faculty from international medical schools to study aspects of medical education that have the potential to improve the medical education in their home country institutions and departments. Further information on the IFME program is available at http://www.ecfmg.org/faimer. For written informa-

tion, please contact FAIMER - International Fellowships in Medical Education, c/o Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), 3624 Market St., Philadelphia PA 19104-2685, USA; Telephone: 215-823-2105; Fax 215-966-3121.

Nursing

Basic study for the nursing profession in the United States takes place at the undergraduate level. The professional-level "registered nurse" (R.N.) has a bachelor's degree in nursing and must fulfill state licensure requirements to practice. Each U.S. state has its own criteria and regulations for licensure; however, every state uses the same licensing examination, known as the NCLEX-RN, which must be passed before a license is awarded. Most states also require nurses educated outside the United States to be certified by the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) before taking the NCLEX-RN.

Certain graduate programs in nursing require state licensure or CGFNS certification, depending on level of patient contact and the laws of the state where the program is offered. Another option in many states is a special limited license for educational purposes. Check licensing requirements carefully with individual programs to see if you qualify for this option. CGFNS certification will also be required if you apply for either a temporary nonimmigrant visa (H-1A) or a permanent visa.

To obtain a CGFNS certificate involves a credential review and an examination. You can be registered for the CGFNS Exam if CGFNS determines that you:

- are currently registered as a first-level general nurse in the country where you were educated;
- have completed an upper secondary school education, separate from nursing education;

- have graduated from a government-recognized general nursing program lasting at least two years;
- have received theory and clinical practice instruction in medical, surgical, obstetric, pediatric, and psychiatric nursing.

The CGFNS Exam tests nursing knowledge and is given approximately three times a year at sites around the world. Candidates for certification must also demonstrate English language proficiency as measured by the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) (Web site: http://toefl.org). For information on the CGFNS certification program, contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center or CGFNS, 3600 Market Street, Suite 400, Philadelphia, PA 19104-2651, USA; Telephone: 215-349-8767; Web site: http://www.cgfns.org.

A variety of options for advanced, specialized nursing education exist in the United States, including university master's and doctoral programs as well as non-degree certificates and continuing education programs, which are usually very brief, offered by universities, hospitals, associations, and other sources. Specializations include nursing administration, nursing education, nurse midwifery, psychiatric nursing, gerontological nursing, public health nursing, and many others.

Veterinary Medicine

Veterinary school is generally entered following completion of a bachelor's degree program. Admission to U.S. veterinary schools is extremely difficult for students from other countries to achieve because of intense competition for a limited number of places. Competition for veterinary study is even more rigorous than that for study in medicine.

Only 27 schools of veterinary medicine exist in the United States. Of these, 25 are largely state-financed, with tax

money from state residents supporting the school. Therefore, applicants from that state are generally given first preference. Only about a third of all those applying to U.S. veterinary schools are accepted by any one of the schools that they apply to, and the number of international applicants accepted is extremely small.

Most veterinary colleges participate in the Veterinary Medical College Application Service (VMCAS), which allows applicants to submit a common application for multiple schools. The primary consideration for admission is the quality of the undergraduate record. More than half of veterinary schools also require the Veterinary Aptitude Test, with some schools accepting the Medical College Admission Test or Graduate Record Examination. For information on VMCAS, contact the service at 1101 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Suite 411, Washington, DC 20005, U.S.A.; Telephone: 202-682-0750; E-mail: vmcas@aavmc.org.

One alternative to veterinary school is to enter a graduate program in animal sciences. Competition for these programs is less intense. Graduates of animal science programs are not certified for veterinary practice but may be qualified for a range of positions in agricultural industries, government, or university research and teaching.

U.S. veterinary schools offer a four-year program. Graduates receive the first professional degree, the doctor of veterinary medicine (D.V.M. or V.M.D.).

Postgraduate Training

Several alternatives for postgraduate training in the United States exist for foreign-trained veterinarians with the equivalent of the D.V.M. Veterinary schools offer postgraduate academic programs leading to a master's or doctoral degree. These programs are not designed to lead toward clinical practice but rather to teaching positions

in veterinary schools or employment by pharmaceutical companies or research careers.

Another postgraduate option is residency training leading toward board certification in a specialty such as veterinary ophthalmology or veterinary pathology. Such residency training, also affiliated with veterinary schools, takes three years and involves a combination of academic and clinical experience. Short-term training and exchanges with U.S. veterinary schools and related organizations may also be arranged in some cases.

To practice veterinary medicine in most of the United States, internationally trained veterinarians must hold certification from the American Veterinary Medical Association's Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG). In all states, veterinarians must also be licensed. For more information, contact the American Veterinary Medical Association, 1931 North Meacham Road, Suite 100, Schaumburg, IL 60173, USA; Telephone: 847-925-8070; Fax: 847-925-1329; E-mail: AVMAINFO@avma.org; Web site: http://www.avma.org/.

Law

The legal system in the United States, on the federal level and in almost all states, is based on the British system of common law. One state, Louisiana, has a system modeled on the French legal code.

First Professional Degree

The U.S. first professional degree, the juris doctor (J.D.), provides an education strongly focused on preparation for U.S. practice, with little opportunity for comparative or specialty study. For this reason, and because preparation in U.S. law will not easily transfer toward practice in other countries, the J.D. is usually inappropriate for foreign nationals. Although law schools offer individual

courses that emphasize particular subject areas such as environmental law or taxation, there are no J.D. programs concentrating on any single specialty.

J.D. degree programs involve three years of study, and are entered following four years of undergraduate study in any major. Competition for admission is intense for both U.S. and international students. Requirements generally include fluency in English, an excellent undergraduate academic record, and a satisfactory score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). (See http://www.lsac.org for LSAT registration information.) To practice in the United States, graduates must also pass the bar examination and other requirements of the state where they wish to work.

Graduate Legal Education

The master of comparative law (M.C.L.), also known as the master of comparative jurisprudence (M.C.J.), is a particularly appropriate degree program for international lawyers. Recognizing that legal systems in many countries differ from common law as practiced in the United States, these programs acquaint lawyers from other countries with U.S. legal institutions and relevant specialties of U.S. law. Another graduate option is the master of laws (L.L.M.), a degree offered in a variety of specialties or as a self-designed program, with appropriateness for the international practitioner varying from program to program. Programs in international law or international business law may also be of interest.

Almost all master's programs in law last one year and admit students only for the fall semester. Programs can be planned according to the interests of the student. During study, international lawyers have the opportunity to observe courts and government agencies in the United States. Entrance requirements include a first degree in law, a strong academic background, letters of

reference, a statement of purpose and/or writing samples, and a high level of English proficiency as demonstrated by the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) for students whose law degree was not in the English language. Most graduate law programs do not require standardized admissions tests.

Doctoral programs in law also exist. They admit only a small number of promising applicants, usually from among those who have completed a master's program at a U.S. law school and who plan to enter a career as a law school faculty member. Financial assistance may be more readily available to law students intending to continue towards a doctoral degree than to those seeking only a one-year master's program.

Short-term Legal Education

Many U.S. law schools offer programs, particularly in the summer, either designed for or appropriate for international lawyers. These usually last between one week and two months. Professional associations and private training organizations offer similar programs.

Your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center may be able to provide information on other options, such as tours to visit U.S. legal institutions.

Time for a Recap

- Entry to U.S. first professional degree programs in dentistry is highly competitive. Graduate options include academic degrees, residencies (particularly in specialty areas), or short-term training and exchanges.

- Entry to the U.S. first professional degree in medicine is extremely difficult, and a bachelor's degree from an accredited U.S. university is usually a minimum requirement.

- For any graduate medical study involving patient contact, physicians educated outside the United States must be certified by ECFMG. Other options not requiring certification include a medically relevant academic degree or training and exchanges not involving patient contact.

- A variety of educational options exist in the United States for internationally educated nurses. In some cases, and always in the case of nurses seeking to qualify for U.S. practice, certification by CGFNS is required.

- Entry to the U.S. first professional degree in veterinary medicine is even more competitive and difficult than it is for medicine. Graduate options include academic degrees, residencies, or short-term training and exchanges. U.S. licensure for veterinarians educated outside the United States requires certification by ECFVG.

- U.S. first professional degree programs in law (J.D.) are generally not appropriate for individuals planning to practice law outside the United States. However, a variety of other degree and short-term options specifically designed for international students exist at the graduate level.

Useful Web Sites

Dentistry
American Dental Education Association (formerly American Association of Dental Schools)
http://www.aads.jhu.edu

American Dental Association
http://www.ada.org

Medicine
American Medical Association – Fellowship and Residency Database
http://www.ama-assn.org/cgi-bin/freida/freida.cgi

Association of American Medical Colleges Academic Medicine
http://www.aamc.org (Also includes information on the Medical College Admission Test, or MCAT, at http://www.aamc.org/stuapps/admiss/mcat/start.htm)

Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates
http://www.ecfmg.org (Also includes information on the Electronic Residency Application Service for ECFMG applicants at http://www.ecfmg.org/eras/index.html)

Federation of State Medical Boards
http://www.fsmb.org

National Board of Medical Examiners
http://www.nbme.org/

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

United States Medical Licensing Examination
http://www.usmle.org

Nursing
Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools
http://www.cgfns.org

National League for Nursing
http://www.nln.org

Veterinary Medicine
Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges
http://www.aavmc.org

American Veterinary Medical Association
http://www.avma.org

National Board Examination Committee for Veterinary Medicine
http://www.nbec.org

Law
American Bar Association
http://www.abanet.org

Association of American Law Schools
http://www.aals.org

Law School Admission Council
http://www.lsac.org

National Conference of Bar Examiners
http://www.ncbex.org

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCHOLARS

In addition to individuals who are beginning graduate or professional study, many mid-career scholars also travel to the United States, whether to participate in postdoctoral research, to lecture, to consult, or to gain additional training. This booklet concludes by providing some information on the academic environment for such visitors, as well as some of the options available for exchanges and some things to consider if you are planning a stay.

The Academic Environment in the United States

Academic and research institutions in the United States differ in many respects from those in other countries. If you will be working with faculty or researchers at universities in the United States, you will need to be aware of the constraints and pressures on academics as well as the underlying structure of the faculty system.

Faculty

In almost every academic institution, faculty members are organized into departments based on academic fields. Each department operates independently and is headed by a department chair. Faculty members of a department usually choose their own chair from among senior members of the department. In many

cases, the position of department chair rotates from one senior faculty member to another, changing every three to four years. In other cases, the department chair remains the same, subject to the approval of other faculty members.

The department operates as a more or less democratic body, with all faculty members participating in important decisions. The department acts within broad limits set by the university to determine requirements for degrees, admit graduate students, decide whether candidates qualify for degrees, choose teaching assistants, determine the curriculum, and hire new faculty for that department. In some departments, primary power lies with the department as a whole. In others, the chair is more powerful than the other members.

Faculty titles denote academic rank. In ascending order, they are "lecturer" (or "instructor"), "assistant professor," "associate professor," and "professor." Except in the case of very distinguished senior professors, most faculty members who know one another address each other by first names and do not use these titles in conversation.

Lecturers and assistant professors have a full teaching load — usually two classes that meet three times a week with a laboratory, or perhaps three classes without a laboratory. In addition, they may have one or more committee assignments (the curriculum committee, the honors committee, and so forth), which may take several hours per week. To this schedule, add time needed for grading papers and exams, for meetings and conferences, and office hours for students, not to mention the many hours of research and writing necessary to build a reputation for scholarly research and to achieve "tenure."

Tenure is a guarantee that a faculty member will remain employed by the university until retirement except in the case of very unusual circumstances such as the elim-

ination of an entire department or extreme misconduct on the part of the tenure holder. The purpose of the tenure system is to preserve academic freedom, to prevent an institution from firing a professor for making unpopular or radical statements or for advocating unorthodox ideas.

Lecturers, instructors, and visiting faculty are not considered for tenure. An assistant professor generally has between five and seven years to gain tenure. At the end of this time a committee of peers (other university faculty) votes on whether or not to recommend tenure. One of the most important considerations is the faculty member's research and publication record.

What difference does this system make to visiting scholars and researchers? You will generally be expected to make commitments of time and to handle teaching loads similar to those of individuals on the permanent faculty. Also, if faculty members are working toward tenure, they may have little time to spare for collaboration with their visitors.

Faculty salaries are often lower than salaries at comparable levels of business or industry. In the 1999-2000 academic year, they ranged from an average of approximately $45,000 for an assistant professor to about $76,000 for a full professor. Instructors and other temporary and adjunct faculty generally earned an average of around $35,000, based on the number of classes taught. Faculty salaries in fields such as engineering and medicine were considerably higher than the average.

Many faculty members serve as consultants to business, industry, and government, both as a source of outside income and as a stimulus for professional development. Senior faculty members sometimes hold joint appointments whereby they have part-time teaching responsibilities and part-time administrative responsibilities.

Students

In the university setting, faculty interactions with students tend to be informal. Often graduate students and faculty become close friends and work together on an almost equal basis.

Since U.S. educational philosophy stresses analysis and critical thinking as well as mastery of information, class formats are designed to stimulate exchange of ideas. Students, whether graduate or undergraduate, do not hesitate to challenge professors in class; in fact, most professors encourage such challenges as a sign of intellectual independence. Encouragement of questioning, however, does not mean that professors lack respect from students. Despite informality, students and faculty maintain a certain personal distance, with students deferring to faculty members.

Faculty members usually construct their own examinations, and students expect that examinations will be given frequently. In most cases, faculty grade examinations and papers for their courses themselves, unless the course has a very high enrollment. In that case, they may rely on teaching assistants to do at least some of the grading.

Research Institutions

Universities differ greatly from one another in the level of their dedication to research. Research and scholarly activity also take place in many kinds of institutions besides universities. Often visiting scholars, researchers, and faculty come to the United States to work in private or public research centers or in hospitals. Visiting scholars may find they have fewer distractions from their projects in institutions dedicated entirely to research as compared with academic institutions.

Most research institutions are organized by field, and they include both an administrative and a scientific, or technical, head for each department (in some cases, this is the same person). Researchers may work together as part of a team, or they may work alone; all have some administrative tie to the department. Grants management staff monitor expenses on any grant involved, and the principal research investigator is usually responsible for an annual grant report.

Quite often, an international researcher establishes an arrangement with a particular research center that focuses on his or her area of research and then obtains a grant from public or private sources (see "Obtaining Funding" below) to work as the principal investigator for the grant.

Finding and Arranging Academic Opportunities

Many avenues exist for scholars, researchers, and faculty to come to the United States as temporary academic visitors. Those described below are some of the most common.

The Fulbright Visiting Scholars Program

Under the auspices of the Fulbright Program, international senior scholars come to the United States to do a year of research or to lecture at U.S. academic institutions. U.S. scholars also travel outside the United States on this program. The U.S. Department of State funds and administers the Fulbright Program; however, many other countries also share in the funding. Approximately 120 countries around the world participate in the Fulbright Program, and the program operates differently in each country. Check with the U.S. embassy or consulate in your country to determine Fulbright opportunities.

The Fulbright Program is an open competition for which scholars apply through the local Fulbright Commission,

the U.S. Educational Foundation, the public affairs section of the U.S. embassy, or other designated office. After preliminary local selection, recommended applications are forwarded to the U.S. Department of State and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board in the United States for final approval.

The Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) in Washington, D.C., assists with the implementation of the program by arranging university affiliations for senior Fulbright scholars at U.S. academic institutions. Once scholars are in the United States, CIES assists in program administration and support.

The Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program

The Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program, also administered by the U.S. Department of State, provides opportunities for a year of study in the United States for accomplished midlevel professionals from developing countries around the world. The Humphrey Program awards fellowships competitively in the fields of natural resources and environmental management; public policy analysis and administration; law and human rights; finance and banking; economic development; agricultural development/economics; human resource management; urban and regional planning; public health policy and management; technology policy and management; educational planning; communications/journalism; and drug abuse epidemiology, education, treatment, and prevention.

Fulbright Commissions, U.S. embassies, and binational centers nominate candidates. The Institute of International Education (IIE) reviews nominations with the assistance of independent selection committees and makes recommendations to the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, which approves final selections and awards fellowships.

In contrast to many fellowship opportunities, the Humphrey Program does not have as its goal the attainment of a degree. Rather, in cooperation with Humphrey Program coordinators on college and university campuses, fellows devise individually tailored plans for their one-year program, combining academic work with professional development and internship activities.

College and University Affiliations Program

The U.S. Department of State's College and University Affiliations Program provides three-year grants to partnerships formed by higher education institutions in the United States and abroad to conduct exchanges of faculty members in the humanities and social sciences.

University Invitational Positions

University departments often have invitational positions, usually to be held for one year, for visiting scholars, researchers, or lecturers. If you have an outstanding reputation as a researcher or have your own professional contacts with U.S. faculty, you may be able to arrange a special invitational position. The U.S. university normally provides a salary and, in addition, may provide research facilities. In some countries, there are agencies that claim to be able to find invitational positions for scholars, but these are rarely effective.

Other Arrangements

Scholars and researchers anticipating a sabbatical or wishing to conduct research in the United States often learn of opportunities by speaking or corresponding with colleagues in the same field or by attending professional meetings. Professors may also learn of colleagues with similar research interests from former students who are in the United States, from U.S. university faculty or administrators who are visiting the country, through

e-mail discussion lists in their academic area, or from papers in scholarly journals. Sometimes scholars and researchers negotiate directly with a department or research center. The probability of arranging a research sabbatical in the United States is higher in business, scientific, and technological fields than in the humanities, social sciences, and the arts.

Obtaining Funding

Take every step possible to secure adequate funding for research. Arrangements for funding visiting researchers and scholars vary greatly. Often the scholar's home institution pays a regular salary while the scholar is on sabbatical. Occasionally, scholars come to the United States using their own funds.

Some foundations and organizations provide grants to support scholarly research in the arts, sciences, humanities, and health-related fields. Although competition is intense, foreign nationals as well as U.S. citizens are often eligible to apply. Grant proposals are generally reviewed by a committee of people active in the field, who are selected by the donor organization. Usually the grant is for a specific amount and supports research at a particular facility or center.

Many grant applications specify that you present not only a research plan, but also an agreement with a research institution before they will fund a grant. It is your responsibility to find an institution that will agree to provide research facilities, employ you, and monitor grant expenditures if you are awarded a grant.

If you do receive a grant, determine whether the grant is awarded to you as an individual, or to the institution, which then agrees to employ you with the funds from the grant. If you leave before the grant is completed and the grant is to the institution, it will remain with the institution.

Perhaps the ideal situation is to find an academic department in the United States with a research grant allowing employment of additional researchers. Usually such arrangements arise through personal correspondence between the people involved. There is no central source for information of this type.

Other Considerations

Negotiating Terms for Your Academic Stay

In negotiating a position as a visiting scholar or researcher, you can avoid many painful misunderstandings by obtaining clear agreement, in writing, about a number of important issues. If you are corresponding with a researcher (and not an administrator), try to ascertain diplomatically whether the key administrator who will be responsible for your arrangements is aware of your needs and interests and is willing to assist in meeting them. In universities, this key administrator is usually the department chair.

In your preliminary correspondence, find out how much time the principal faculty contact person, as well as others in the department, will actually be able to devote to collaboration or consultation with you. Also, find out how directly involved your faculty contact will be in the specific research project in which you are interested.

Discuss what form the collaboration will take. Request a copy of the curriculum vitae of the people you will be working with and become familiar with their work's scope and background, as well as their individual educational backgrounds, travel experience, and language abilities. Make sure you share proficiency in at least one language with these people. Finally, arrive at a mutual understanding about the length of time that you will be visiting or working.

U.S. university departments may extend courtesies to visiting scholars such as an office, a university identification card that may allow access to such facilities as the university library and gymnasium, authorization to apply for a parking permit, and perhaps services of university support staff. These privileges are by no means guaranteed. You should make sure before you come that your expectations match those of the department in detail, not just in broad outlines.

Universities and research centers in the United States are not as highly subsidized as they are in many other countries. Funds for research must be carefully budgeted within the department or research program. If you need access to a personal computer and particular software, specific laboratory equipment, or time scheduled to use specialized university facilities, negotiate with the department or the key administrators regarding how these resources will be provided and funded.

In a number of research areas, for reasons of national security, there are government restrictions to information access. If the research center with which you are negotiating has been awarded sensitive U.S. government contracts, the institution may require that its researchers hold security clearances. If you are not a U.S. citizen, this requirement may pose a problem.

Sometimes visiting scholars wish to attend classes. Some universities extend this option as a courtesy without charge; some do not. Demands on faculty time and the tight budgets of many institutions can make this issue a sensitive one. If you think that you might be interested in taking courses, whether for credit or not, correspond with the university before beginning your stay so that everyone has a clear understanding, in writing, of the policy.

Corresponding With the Office of International Services

On some university campuses, particularly those of large research universities, an Office of International Services (which may use a slightly different name) offers a valuable liaison between visiting scholars, researchers, or faculty and the campus community. On other campuses, such an office may exist primarily as a resource for students, but even so, it may be a useful source of information. For one thing, this office can provide information about many aspects of living and working in the United States and at the particular institution that you have chosen. (In a research center or training hospital, a training liaison officer often performs some of the functions of an Office of International Services.)

Because these offices were originally established primarily in response to the needs of international students, the office that assists scholars, researchers, and visiting faculty may be called the International Student Office. Such descriptions are not meant to belittle the status of scholars and international faculty members; they are simply a historical remnant. Most campuses, in fact, have been changing the names of these offices to reflect current realities in international exchange.

Professional Meetings, Conferences, and Seminars

While making your plans for U.S. study, correspond with professional associations in your areas of interest to determine dates and locations of meetings, seminars, conferences, and other short-term professional development programs in your field. Such events can be costly, but the benefits in terms of keeping current in your field and of having opportunities to make contacts with your peers usually justify the expense. If you have a grant or fellowship, ask if there is a provision for attending conferences or for other professional development activities.

Time for a Recap

- The U.S. academic environment and structure differs from that of other countries. Less senior faculty members are likely to be extremely busy with the demands of pursuing tenure. Interaction with students tends to be relatively informal.

- Many paths exist for arranging an academic visit, including participation in various government exchange programs, a university invitational position, or arrangements made with U.S. colleagues.

- Funding may be obtained from your home institution, an exchange program, a U.S. government program, organizational grants, or other means. Be sure to review the terms of grants carefully.

- Obtain clear agreements in writing from the U.S. institution you are visiting regarding the terms of your stay and what arrangements will be made.

- Seek out contacts such as the Office of International Services that can provide advance information helpful for your stay.

- Look into additional professional development activities that may enhance your stay.

Useful Web Sites

Information on the Fulbright Program
http://www.iie.org
http://www.fulbright.org

Council for International Exchange of Scholars
http://www.cies.org

Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
http://wwics.si.edu

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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

This list is only a sampling of available resources and does not imply endorsement.

Graduate Education

Doctoral Education: Preparing for the Future. 1997. Jules B. LaPidus. Council of Graduate Schools, Washington, DC. http://www.cgsnet.org

The Doctor of Philosophy Degree. 1990. Council of Graduate Schools, Washington, DC. http://www.cgsnet.org

Graduate School and You. 1999. Council of Graduate Schools, Washington, DC. http://www.cgsnet.org

Institution/Program Selection

The College Board International Student Handbook. Published annually. The College Board, New York, NY. http://www.collegeboard.com

GRE/CGS Directory of Graduate Programs.
Published biannually. Jointly published by the Graduate Record Examinations Board and the Council of Graduate Schools.
http://www.cgsnet.org
Volume A – Natural Sciences
Volume B – Engineering, Business
Volume C – Social Sciences, Education
Volume D – Arts, Humanities, Other Fields

Peterson's Annual Guide to Graduate Study.
Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com
Book 1 – Graduate and Professional Programs
Book 2 – Graduate Programs in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
Book 3 – Graduate Programs in the Biological Sciences
Book 4 – Graduate Programs in the Physical Sciences, Mathematics, Agricultural Sciences, the Environment and Natural Resources
Book 5 – Graduate Programs in Engineering and Applied Sciences
Book 6 – Graduate and Professional Programs in Business, Education, Health, Information Studies, Law and Social Work

Peterson's Distance Learning Programs 2000.
1999. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Financial Assistance

The following directories are described above:

The College Board International Student Handbook
GRE/CGS Directory of Graduate Programs
Peterson's Annual Guide to Graduate Study

Financing Graduate School.
1996. Patricia McWade. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Funding for U.S. Study: A Guide for Citizens of Other Nations. 1996. IIE Books, Institute of International Education, New York, NY.
http://www.iie.org.

Grants for Graduate and Postdoctoral Study.
1998. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Scholarships for Study in the USA and Canada.
1999. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Personal Statement Writing

Graduate Admissions Essays — What Works, What Doesn't and Why. Donald Asher. Ten-Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.
http://www.tenspeed.com

Graduate Admissions Essays: Write Your Way Into the Graduate School of Your Choice. 2000. Donald Asher. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.
http://www.tenspeed.com

How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School — 3rd edition. 1997. Richard J. Stelzer. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Admissions Test Preparation

The following companies sell a range of test preparation books for the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Graduate Management Admission Test

(GMAT), and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL):

Educational Testing Service (ETS)
http://www.ets.org

Peterson's (Thomson Learning)
http://www.petersons.com

Princeton Review
http://www.PrincetonReview.com

Some U.S. educational information and advising centers sell books by the publishers listed above and others. In addition, test preparation materials are available from these and similar companies for other tests, including the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools exam, the Dental Admission Test, the Law School Admission Test, the Medical College Admission Test, and the U.S. Medical Licensing Examination.

English Language Programs

English Language and Orientation Programs. 1997. Institute of International Education, New York, NY.
http://www.iie.org

Peterson's English Language Programs. 1998. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Professional Information

Graduate Medical Education Directory. Published annually. American Medical Association, Dover, DE.
http://www.ama-assn.org/cgi-bin/freida/freida.cgi
(Look under "Medical Education Products.")

Medical School Admission Requirements 2001-2002: United States and Canada. 2000. Association of American Medical Colleges, Washington, DC. http://www.aamc.org

Occupational Outlook Handbook. Published annually. U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Publication Sales Center, PO Box 2145, Chicago, IL 60690, USA. Tel: 312-353-18810. http://www.dol.gov

Official American Bar Association Guide to Approved Law Schools, 2001 Edition. Rick L. Morgan and Kurt Snyder (Editors). 2000. IDG Books Worldwide, Inc. http://www.abanet.org/legaled/publications/pubs.html

Peterson's MBA Programs. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ. http://www.petersons.com

Peterson's Nursing Programs, 6th Edition. 2000. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ. http://www.petersons.com

Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements in the United States and Canada. 2000. Association of American Veterinary Colleges. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, IN. http://www.thepress.purdue.edu

Postdoctoral Research

Research Centers Directory. Edition 26. 2000. Gale Group, Farmington Hills, MI. http://www.gale.com

Predeparture Information

NAFSA's International Student Handbook: The Essential Guide to University Study in the U.S.A. 1998. NAFSA: Association of International Educators, Washington, DC.
http://www.nafsa.org
(Available at U.S. educational information and advising centers.)

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Academic adviser: Member of the faculty who helps and advises students on academic matters. He or she may also assist students during the registration process.

Academic year: The period of formal academic instruction, usually extending from September to May. Depending on the institution, it may be divided into terms of varying lengths: semesters, trimesters, or quarters.

Accreditation: Approval of colleges, universities, and secondary schools by nationally recognized professional associations. Institutional accreditation affects the transferability of credits from one institution to another before a degree program is completed and the continuation from one degree level to the next level.

Add/Drop: A process at the beginning of a term whereby students can change their course schedules, adding or dropping classes with the instructor's permission.

Assistantship: A study grant of financial assistance to a graduate student that is offered in return for certain services in teaching or laboratory supervision as a teaching assistant, or for services in research as a research assistant.

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

Baccalaureate degree: The degree of "bachelor" conferred upon graduates of most U.S. colleges and universities.

Bachelor's degree: Degree conferred by an institution of higher learning after the student has accumulated a certain number of undergraduate credits. Usually a bachelor's degree takes four years to earn, and it is a prerequisite for studies in a graduate program.

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

Carrel: Individual study area usually reserved for graduate students in a library; available on a first-come, first-served basis (sometimes for a fee).

CGFNS: Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools.

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 (for example, the top 25 percent, the lower 50 percent).

College: An institution of higher learning that offers undergraduate programs, usually of a four-year duration, that lead to the bachelor's degree in the arts or sciences (B.A. or B.S.). The term "college" is also used in a general sense to refer to a postsecondary institution. A college may also be a part of the organizational structure of a university.

College catalog: An official publication of a college or university giving information about academic programs, facilities (such as laboratories, dormitories, etc.), entrance requirements, and student life.

Core requirements: Compulsory courses required for completion of the degree.

Course: Regularly scheduled class sessions of one to five (or more) hours per week during a term. A degree program is made up of a specified number of required and elective courses and varies from institution to institution. The courses offered by an institution are usually assigned a name and a number (such as Mathematics 101) for identification purposes.

Credits: Units that institutions use to record the completion of courses of instruction (with passing or higher grades) that are required for an academic degree. The catalog of a college or university defines the number and the kinds of credits that are required for its degrees and states the value in terms of degree credit — "credit hours" or "credit units" — of each course offered.

Cut: Unauthorized absence from a class.

DAT: Dental Admission Test required of applicants to dental schools.

Dean: Director or highest authority within a certain professional school or college of a university.

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 through which instruction in a certain field of study is given (such as English department, history department).

Dissertation: Thesis written on an original topic of research, usually presented as one of the final requirements for the doctorate (Ph.D.).

Doctorate (Ph.D.): The highest academic degree conferred by a university on students who have completed at least three years of graduate study beyond the bachelor's and/or master's degree and who have demonstrated their academic ability in oral and written examinations and through original research presented in the form of a dissertation.

Dormitories: Housing facilities on the campus of a college or university reserved for students. A typical dormitory would include student rooms, bathrooms, common rooms, and possibly a cafeteria.

Drop: See "Withdrawal."

ECFMG: Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates.

ECFVG: Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates.

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

ERAS: Electronic Residency Application System for obtaining a residency position in the field of medicine in the United States.

Faculty: The members of the teaching staff, and occasionally the administrative staff, of an educational institution. The faculty is responsible for designing the plans of study offered by the institution.

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

Fellowship: A study grant of financial assistance, usually awarded to a graduate student. Generally, no service is required of the student in return.

Final exam: A cumulative exam, taken at the end of a term, encompassing all material covered in a particular course.

Financial assistance: A general term that includes all types of money, loans, and part-time jobs offered to a student.

Flunk: To fail an examination or a course.

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

Full-time student: One who is enrolled in an institution taking a full load of courses; the number of courses and hours is specified by the institution.

GMAT: Graduate Management Admission Test, usually required for applicants to business or management programs.

Grade: The evaluation of a student's academic work.

Grade point average: A system of recording academic achievement based on an average, calculated by multiplying the numerical grade received in each course by the number of credit hours studied.

Grading system: The type of scale — that is, letter grade, pass/fail, percentage — used by schools, colleges, and universities in the United States. Most institutions 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 or 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 65 to 70 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 bachelor's degrees.

GRE: Graduate Record Examination, often required of applicants to graduate schools in fields other than professional programs such as medicine, dentistry, or law. Both a GRE general test and subject tests for specific fields are offered.

High school: The last three or four years of the twelve-year school education program in the United States; secondary school.

Higher education: Postsecondary education at colleges, universities, junior or community colleges, professional schools, technical institutes, and teacher-training schools.

Institute of technology: An institution of higher education that specializes in the sciences and technology.

International student adviser: 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 arrangements, and insurance.

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

Language requirement: A requirement of some graduate programs that students must show basic reading and writing proficiency in one other language besides their own to receive their degree.

Lecture: Common method of instruction in college and university courses; a professor lectures in classes of 20 to several hundred students. Lectures may be supplemented with regular small group discussions led by teaching assistants.

Liberal arts (or "liberal arts and sciences," or "arts and sciences"): A term referring to academic studies of subjects in the humanities (language, literature, philosophy, the arts), the social sciences (economics, sociology, anthropology, history, political science), and the physical sciences (mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry).

LSAT: Law School Admission Test required of applicants to professional law programs and some postgraduate law programs in American law schools.

Maintenance: Refers to the expenses of attending a college or university, including room (living quarters), board (meals), books, clothing, laundry, local transportation, and miscellaneous expenses.

Major: The subject or area of studies in which a student concentrates. Undergraduates usually choose a major after the first two years of general courses in the arts and sciences.

Major professor/thesis adviser: For research degrees, the professor who works closely with a student in planning and choosing a research plan, in conducting the research, and in presenting the results. The major professor serves as the head of a committee of faculty members who review progress and results.

Master's degree: Degree conferred by an institution of higher learning after students complete academic requirements that usually include a minimum of one year's study beyond the bachelor's degree.

MCAT: Medical College Admission Test required of applicants to U.S. medical schools.

Midterm exam: An exam administered after half the academic term has passed that covers all course material studied up to that point.

NCLEX-RN: A licensing examination for registered nurses. It is required by each state and must be passed before a nurse can practice in that state.

Non-resident: 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 non-residents. Foreign students are usually classified as non-residents, and there is little possibility of changing to resident status at a later date for fee purposes. Most publicly supported institutions will not permit a foreign student to be classified as a resident student while on a student visa.

Notarization: The certification of a document, a statement, or a signature as authentic and true by a public official — known in the United States as a notary public. Applicants in other countries should have their documents certified or notarized in accordance with instructions.

NRMP: National Resident Matching Program for applicants to U.S. medical schools.

Placement test: An examination used to test a student's academic ability in a certain field so that he or she may be placed in the appropriate courses in that field. In some cases a student may be given academic credit based on the results of a placement test.

Plan of study: A detailed description of the course of study for which a candidate applies. The plan should incorporate the objectives given in the student's "statement of purpose."

Postdoctorate: Studies designed for those who have completed their doctorate.

Postgraduate: Usually refers to studies for individuals who have completed a graduate degree. May also be used to refer to graduate education.

Prerequisite: Program or course that a student is required to complete before being permitted to enroll in a more advanced program or course.

President: The rector or highest administrative officer of an academic institution.

Professional degree: Usually obtained after a bachelor's degree in fields such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or law.

Qualifying examination: In many graduate departments, an examination given to students who have completed required coursework for a doctoral degree, but who have not yet begun the dissertation or thesis. A qualifying examination may be oral or written, or both, and must be passed for the student to continue.

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

Quiz: Short written or oral test; a quiz is less formal than an examination.

Recommendation, letter of (also called "personal recommendation," "personal endorsement," or "personal reference"): A letter appraising an applicant's qualifications, written by a professor or employer who knows the applicant's character and work.

Registration: Process through which students select courses to be taken during a quarter, semester, or trimester.

Residency: Clinical training in a chosen specialty.

R.N.: Registered nurse.

Sabbatical: Leave time with pay granted to a teacher or professor after serving for six or seven years on the same faculty. Its purpose is to give the faculty member an extended period of time for concentrated study.

Scholarship: A study grant of financial assistance, usually given at the undergraduate level, that may be supplied in the form of a cancellation or remission of tuition and/or fees.

Semester: Period of study of approximately 15 to 16 weeks' duration, usually half of an academic year.

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

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

Social Security Number: A number issued by the U.S. government to jobholders for payroll deductions for old age, survivors, and disability insurance. Anyone who works regularly must obtain one. Many institutions use the Social Security Number as a student identification number.

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

Special student: A student at a college or university who is not enrolled as a candidate for a degree. Also may be referred to as a non-degree, non-matriculating, or visiting student.

Subject: Course in an academic discipline offered as part of a curriculum of an institution of higher learning.

Survey course: A course that covers briefly the principal topics of a broad field of knowledge.

Syllabus: An outline of topics to be covered in an academic course.

Teachers' college: Institution of higher learning that confers degrees in teacher education and related areas, or a college within a university that offers professional preparation for teachers.

Tenure: A position granted to senior faculty members who have demonstrated a worthy research and publication record. Its purpose is to preserve academic freedom.

Test: Examination; any procedure measuring the academic progress of a student.

Thesis: A written work containing the results of research on a specific topic prepared by a candidate for a bachelor's or master's degree.

TOEFL: Test of English as a Foreign Language, required of graduate school applicants whose native language is not English.

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 also states the date a degree has been conferred.

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

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

Undergraduate studies: Two- or four-year programs in a college or university after high school graduation, leading to the associate or bachelor's degree.

University: An educational institution that usually maintains one or more four-year undergraduate colleges (or schools) with programs leading to a bachelor's degree, a graduate school of arts and sciences awarding master's degrees and doctorates (Ph.D.s), and graduate professional schools.

USMLE: U.S. Medical Licensing Examination.

VAT: Veterinary Aptitude Test, required of applicants to most U.S. veterinary schools.

VMCAS: Veterinary Medical College Application Service; a comprehensive service collecting data for veterinary medical schools.

Withdrawal: The administrative procedure of dropping a course or leaving an institution.

Zip code: A series of numbers in mailing addresses that designate postal delivery districts in the United States.

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