

USA

Why study in America? That's the question. How does one choose from the thousands of accredited colleges and universities? How do you choose your university?

Deciding on a university and a major is the most important decision you will make – and you will need to make this decision as you would your studies – with thoughtful determination and careful searching. You must give yourself plenty of time for this big task – it takes a lot of your time!

“University” and “College”: is there a difference? You will frequently hear the terms *university* or *college* (or even school!). They are basically the same thing – you spend 4 years studying towards an undergraduate degree.

For your bachelor's degree you choose a 'major' (i.e. your course).

In American colleges and universities you have the freedom to take a course for up to two years without making a final decision on your major.

Nearly 10% of American freshman (first year students) enter not knowing what they will decide for their major before the second year (sophomore). All of this is about “finding oneself”.

The American system is based on semester and credit hours: there are usually three semesters – fall (September), winter (January) and summer. You earn credits on each course you take. During each semester you can take different courses earning credits. When you have earned all the credits required you are awarded the degree.

There are many different types of degrees that colleges and universities offer. The three main types of degrees are associate degrees, bachelor degrees and master degrees. Some students go on to obtain an even more advanced degree, which is a doctorate or PhD.

To get a Bachelor's degree you must complete about
124-135 credit hours.

One semester is about 12 credits

Searching for a university in America is a big challenge. You need time. You have to start early.

Your first step is taking the decision to start searching and sticking to it. Never give up! Begin by deciding on the type of university you want and its location. For example, how important is the size? Would you prefer a university in a big city, a small university, a university set in a campus with all facilities available, what kind of town or city would you like to live in? Is there a particular facility you want nearby? Do you want to be near relatives?

Then remember what kind of environment would you prefer? What is the climate like? All these are very important – you will be living there for the next four years at least!

Another thing to take into consideration is whether to choose a public or private university, the costs and the majors available. Make a list or a form – www.acuinfo.com has a form to help you get started.

Now 'ranking' is often a big thing. There are many different ways of ranking; for example by a major or a faculty - which does not make the whole university better than another.

The best advice about ranking is use it **only as a guide** if you have no idea where you want to go to. Ranking may tell you what schools (in USA schools also mean universities/colleges!) are popular but do not use it as a gauge of the school's overall quality. You will find plenty of websites on rankings!

Do a search, but remember there are NO official rankings of universities in the United States.

www.educationusa.state.gov
www.review.com
www.collegeview.com
www.petersons.com
www.aamc

To study medicine you must submit MCAT
(*Medical College Admission Test*)
scores while doing your bachelors degree.

Then there is 'public' or private'. Is there any difference? Basically, a public institution receives some of its budget from state tax revenues with a mission from the state where it is located and is accountable to the elected officials of that state. Most private colleges and universities are independent, non-profit institutions. They operate with revenues from tuition, private gifts and federal, private or corporate foundation grants.

The next step is the '**standardized**' tests. Universities and colleges use the test to help evaluate student's readiness for admission or to place them in appropriate courses. The most frequently used tests are ACT, SAT and TOEFL.

The **SAT I** (Scholastic Assessment Test) measures verbal and math reasoning abilities that you've developed throughout your school years.

Check www.collegeboard.com for registration and sample tests.

The multiple-choice test, developed by the not-for-profit Educational Testing Service, is intended to let students demonstrate their verbal and mathematical abilities without regard to the kind of schooling they've had.

According to the College Board, the test looks for a student's ability to understand and analyze written material, to draw inferences, to differentiate shades of meaning, to draw conclusions and solve math problems -- all skills that are necessary for success in college and the work world.

The **SAT II: Subject Tests**, are intended to measure a student's knowledge of a particular subject, such as English (writing or literature), history and social sciences, mathematics (various levels), sciences, and languages (French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Spanish, English etc.). Some colleges require one or more SAT II tests, but even if they aren't required, SAT II tests scores can help you present a more personalized portfolio that shows how well you would fit at a particular school. Most colleges use SAT II scores not for admission purposes but for program placement.

How do you know which subject test to take? First, make a list of all the colleges you're considering. Then review their catalogs or web sites to find out if they require Subject Test scores for admission and, if so, which ones.

Use your list of colleges and their admission requirements to help plan your high school course schedule. For example, a college to which you plan to apply may require a language Subject Test score or might exempt you from a first-year course requirement if you do well on a language Subject Test. There is no pass or fail mark. Your success depends entirely on the minimum required by the university. You can take the test more than once – the higher score is taken. You will find all information on the SAT test on the website www.collegeboard.com which is also the American universities official universities website.

The SAT and TOEFL should only be taken through

AMIDEAST www.amideast.org/kuwait

Then there is the **TOEFL**. (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Any student whose first language is not English usually has to take the test.

Universities also accept the **IELTS** (International English Language Testing System offered by the British Council). But if you are coming from a British system of schooling many universities will consider your application without these tests. You must check with the individual universities. More on TOEFL and IELTS can be found on www.ets.org/toefl and www.ielts.org

The SAT and TOEFL have to be taken through AMIDEAST.
www.amideast.org and click on Kuwait. Do not take them anywhere else.

When registering for SAT make sure, if you can, to list the universities you are applying to as the SAT scores have to be sent directly to the universities. You cannot send them yourself.

First year of an American university is called *Freshman*.

Second year is *Sophomore*

In some American universities you can earn credits with your A level subjects

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

After you have made your list of universities and checked their requirements you are ready to start the application process.

The application is your way of introducing yourself to the admissions office. You are trying to make a good first impression!

Before you start, read the application carefully to find out the application fee and the deadlines for submitting your application.

If you miss the deadline your application will be rejected! Check what each university's requirements are – do not waste their time by sending documents that are not requested. Remember, they have to deal with thousands of applications and if you give a good impression they may send you a letter of acceptance.

Photocopy an application form and work on it in rough, and check carefully before submitting. Nearly all universities now have the application forms online which saves a lot of time.

Make sure your standardized test scores (SAT, TOEFL) are sent or have been sent to the university.

You will need to send your **transcript**. This is an important part of the application process. The transcript is prepared by the school for you. It contains information on your term and test grades and any external examinations you have taken in secondary school.

With the application form you will find forms for references for either the school councilor and/or one or two teacher references. Remember - follow the directions – you will not be in a position to ask an admissions officer for exceptions. Make a photocopy of your completed application and submit as early as possible.

If there is a problem with your applications this will allow you to work through it with the admissions staff in plenty of time. Applications are only processed after all appropriate materials have been received.

Many universities ask for an essay or a combination of essays and short-answer topics. This is another way they use to find out more about you and how well you communicate your thoughts. This is where you can give a good impression of yourself! The essay is used to determine your thoughts, creativity and how you will fit into life at that college.

The academic calendar of an American university is slightly different to the British and Australian. They usually have two semesters of 18 weeks each (Fall, Winter or Spring).

If you want to shorten your four year course you have the option to earn your credit hours in the summer term.

Generally students start their degree course in the Fall (September/October), but you could also apply to enter for the Winter semester in January.