Define Your Priorities

When searching for a graduate program in the United States, it is important to first decide what is most important to you. This will help guide you through each of ***Your 5 Steps to U.S. Study***. Please answer the following questions with as much information as possible.

Why do you want to study in the United States?

Every student is different, and it is important to think about your own primary reasons to pursue a graduate degree in the United States. These reasons may change over time, but they will help guide your graduate program search.

***As you begin to search for a graduate program in the United States, you should think about*:**

Your Short-term Goals

- In what field of study will you pursue a graduate degree?
  - ☐ **Agricultural Sciences**
  - ☐ **Architecture**
  - ☐ **Arts and Humanities**
  - ☐ **Business**
  - ☐ **Computer Science/Technology**
  - ☐ **Dentistry**
  - ☐ **Education (including Teaching)**
  - ☐ **Engineering**
  - ☐ **Journalism & Mass Communications**
  - ☐ **Law (including Criminal Justice)**
  - ☐ **Medicine**
  - ☐ **Natural Sciences (including Biological & Life Sciences and Physical & Earth Science**
  - ☐ **Nursing**
  - ☐ **Political Science and International Relations**
  - ☐ **Public Health**
  - ☐ **Public Policy and Administration**
  - ☐ **Social Sciences (including Behavioral Sciences, Humanities and Cultures)**
  - ☐ **Veterinary Medicine**
  - ☐ **Other**

- Is there a subcategory in this field or a special topic of interest to you?
  - ☐ **Yes**
  - ☐ **No**

- What will be your next degree level in the United States?
  - ☐ **Specialized training/certification**
  - ☐ **Master's degree** - The degree awarded upon completion of academic requirements that usually include a minimum of one year's study beyond the bachelor's degree.
  - ☐ **Doctoral degree** - The highest academic degree conferred by a university to students who have completed graduate study beyond the bachelor's and/or master's degree. It is also know as a doctorate degree. Students should demonstrate their academic ability through oral and written examinations and original research presented in the form of a dissertation.
  - ☐ **Undecided**

- List any research or professional experience that you would like your graduate program faculty to have:

Your Long-term Goals

- After you finish this degree in the United States and return to your home country, what type of job or employment do you plan to seek? For example, doctor, engineer, social worker, teacher, etc.

- What skills do you want to improve while in the United States?

- How will studying in the United States help you improve these skills?

Your Past Experience

- Have you previously earned any degrees at a college or university? Select all that apply.
  - ☐ **Yes**
    - ☐ **Specialized training/certification**
    - ☐ **Bachelor's degree**
    - ☐ **Master's degree**
    - ☐ **Doctoral degree**
  - ☐ **No**

    Graduate study in the United States will require the completion of at least a bachelor's degree or its equivalent.

- Do you currently hold a bachelor's degree in the same field you wish to study while in the United States?
  - ☐ **Yes**
  - ☐ **No**

    You may need to ask the U.S. institution what prerequisites, if any, will be required prior to beginning your graduate program.

- Do you have any professional work experience?
  - ☐ **Yes**
  - ☐ **No**

    You may need to ask the U.S. institution what work experience, if any, will be required prior to beginning your graduate program.

How will you pay for your studies in the United States?

Tuition, fees, and living costs vary greatly between institutions, making U.S. higher education affordable to hundreds of thousands of international students each year. Visit the educationusa.state.gov to learn more about the different ways other international students have funded their U.S. studies.

As you begin to find your own funding sources, you should think about:

Your Financial Contribution

Your financial contribution can come from family, personal, and/or other sources.

- How much money, in U.S. Dollars, can your own source(s) contribute each year?
  - ☐ **Less than $5,000**
  - ☐ **$5,000–$10,000**
  - ☐ **$10,000–15,000**
  - ☐ **$15,000–$25,000**
  - ☐ **More than $25,000**

Financial Aid

When seeking financial aid, you may qualify for many options at the graduate level.

- From this list, which financial aid options interest you?

☐ **U.S. College or University Scholarship**

☐ **Assistantship**

〉 Student will work for the institution in research, teaching, and/or office administration. In turn, the student will be provided a tuition waiver and stipend for living expenses.

〉 Assistantships can be very competitive and more funding will be available in the fields of science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) and other research-based fields.

☐ **Fellowship**

〉 Student will be offered a grant to cover costs while earning a doctoral degree. This grant may cover tuition, fees, and/or living costs in part or in full.

〉 Fellowships can be very competitive and more funding will be available in the fields of science, technology, engineering, math (STEM) and other research-based fields.

☐ **On-campus Employment**

〉 Current U.S. immigration regulations allow international students to work up to 20 hours per week on campus while school is in session, and up to 40 hours per week during school vacations or breaks.

〉 You will need to learn more about job opportunities and specific requirements for international students on your college or university campus. On average, students can earn between US$2,000-$3,000 per year for personal expenses.

☐ **Student Loan**

〉 You might be able to find a loan to pay for part of your educational costs from a bank or lender in your home country. Some U.S. loans may be available, but they may have added requirements.

☐ **U.S. Government or Private Sponsor**

〉 Limited funding opportunities are available from the U.S. government for graduate students, and some funding may be available from private sponsors, such as U.S. organizations and corporations with scholarship programs for international students.

☐ **Sources in Your Country**

〉 Funding may be available in your home country, either from the government, a university, or a private sponsor such as your employer or a private organization.

Which type of U.S. institution is best for you?

More than 1,000 accredited colleges and universities in the United States offer academic program options for graduate and professional students.

***As you begin to narrow down your choices, you should think about*:**

Program Type

- Which type of program would best fit your needs as a graduate student in the United States?
  - ☐ **Graduate program** (master's and doctoral degree programs in a wide variety of academic fields)
  - ☐ **Professional program** (specializations and licensure in specific academic fields such as law, dentistry, and medicine)

Selectivity

The selectivity of a graduate program will largely depend on the percentage of applicants who are accepted into the department. This percentage may vary each year and can depend on (1) departmental needs; (2) availability of funding; and (3) quality of the applications received.

How competitive you are will often depend on your past academic performance, standardized test scores, and your overall background. Think about your performance as an undergraduate student and answer each question in this list.

Undergraduate Performance

How does your local university measure academic performance? This could be a grade point average (GPA*), percentile average, test score, or other type of measure.

** The combined average of a student's grades for all academic coursework completed. In the United States, high school grades are usually assigned in letters and are based on a 4.0 GPA scale.*

Grade	GPA
A	4.0 (excellent)
B	3.0 (good)
C	2.0 (satisfactory)
D	1.0 (needs improvement)
F	0.0 (fail)

- How did you perform as an undergraduate student based on this GPA measure?
  - ☐ **Your performance was excellent.**
  - ☐ **Your performance was good.**
  - ☐ **Your performance was satisfactory.**
  - ☐ **Your performance needed improvement.**
  - ☐ **You did not perform well in school.**

- Which of the following standardized admission tests have you taken?
  - ☐ **GRE** (or practice test) A standardized test of verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning and analytical writing that measures readiness for graduate-level study.

    Score

  - ☐ **GMAT** (or practice test) A standardized test for MBA applicants that measures basic verbal, mathematical, and analytical writing skills that have been developed over a long period of time through education and work.

    Score

  - ☐ **LSAT** (or practice test) A half-day standardized test that provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law schools can use as one of several factors in assessing applicants.

    Score

  - ☐ **MCAT** (or practice test) A standardized, multiple-choice examination designed to assess problem solving, critical thinking, writing skills, and knowledge of science concepts and principles prerequisite to the study of medicine.

    Score

  - ☐ **TOEFL** Test of English as a Foreign Language—An English language proficiency examination of applicants whose native language is not English.

    Score

  - ☐ **IELTS** International English Language Testing System—An English language proficiency examination of applicants whose native language is not English.

    Score

  - ☐ **Other**

    Score

Size

The size of a college or university campus can impact many things, such as the number of students in a classroom, which courses or subjects are offered, the ease of meeting new friends, and the overall environment. Imagine yourself going to a small, medium, or large campus.

- Which of the following would be best for you?
  - ☐ **Small (less than 2,000 students)**
  - ☐ **Medium (2,000–15,000 students)**
  - ☐ **Large (more than 15,000 students)**
  - ☐ **No Preference**

The number of international students enrolled at the institution may be important to you as well. This number can vary between a low, medium, or high international student population.

- Which of the following would be best for you?
  - ☐ **Low international student population**
  - ☐ **Medium international student population**
  - ☐ **High international student population**

Public and Private Institutions

The U.S. government does not own or operate academic institutions. Instead, you have the option to choose between state- or privately-operated institutions. Some of the best colleges and universities in the U.S. are state-operated, and some are private.

- Do you prefer to study at a public institution, a private institution, or do you not have a preference?
  - ☐ **Public**
    - 〉 In the United States, each of the 50 states operates public institutions that are funded in part by people who live in that state and pay taxes. More than 650 public four-year and more than 1,100 public two-year institutions are in the United States.
    - 〉 Public state-run institutions usually have lower tuition and fees, but financial assistance may be more limited.
  - ☐ **Private**
    - 〉 Private institutions operate as not-for-profit or for-profit. More than 2,000 four-year and more than 1,000 two-year institutions are privately owned and operated in the United States.
    - 〉 Private institutions have, on average, higher tuition and fees, but more financial assistance may be available.

☐ **No preference**

- 〉 If you are looking for specific academic programs or financial assistance, you may have to choose between public or private institutions.
- 〉 If you are not looking for specific academic programs or financial assistance, you may want to think about both public and private institutions.

Other Types of Institutions

U.S. colleges and universities may also be known for other reasons, such as having a special subject focus like science or art, a religious affiliation, or an all-male or all-female campus.

- Are you looking for a U.S. college or university with a specific characteristic that is important to you?

☐ **Yes:** Please explain

☐ **No**

How easily will you adjust to your new community and environment?

The United States is a very diverse country, offering a variety of climates, cultural heritage, and landscapes from coast to coast. Imagine yourself studying in the United States and think about the environment you want.

***As you imagine the environment you want, you should think about*:**

Region

The United States is often divided into four distinct regions. Refer to the map below to see the different regions.

- Which region would be best for you?

☐ **West**

- 〉 The largest region of the United States covering more than half its land area, making it the most geographically diverse area. It is known for mild and damp climates to very dry and hot ones, with greater access to mountain ranges, desert areas, forests, and the Pacific coastline.

☐ **Midwest**

- 〉 Also called “Middle America,” it is known for low-lying plains, small hills, and access to large freshwater lakes bordering Canada. Seasonal climate change, ranging from mild summers to cold winters with heavy snowfall, is also common in the Midwestern states.

☐ **Northeast**

〉 Comprised of the New England and Middle Atlantic states, this region is known for its forested interior and rocky Atlantic coastline. Seasonal climate change, ranging from mild summers to cold winters with heavy snowfall, is also common in the Northeastern states.

☐ **South**

〉 A region known for its sub-tropical climate with humid summers and mild winters. Southern states have diverse landscapes, including mountains, wetlands, arid deserts, and the Gulf of America coastline.

Setting

Virtually every U.S. state includes a setting that can range from an urban city, suburban residential area, or a rural countryside. U.S. colleges and universities may be located in any one of these settings.

- Which setting would be best for you?

☐ **Urban**

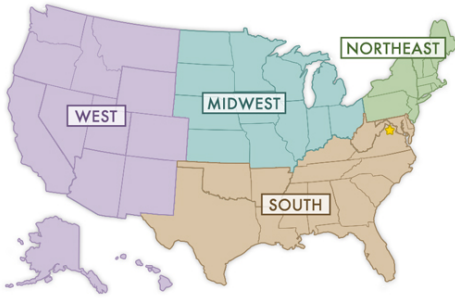
〉 Cities with larger populations providing convenient access to banking, stores, the arts, entertainment, public transportation, and international airports. Urban areas may have higher average living costs.

☐ **Suburban**

〉 Residential areas close or farther from cities, with moderate populations and more spread-out restaurants and shopping areas. Suburban areas may have more moderate average living costs.

☐ **Rural**

〉 Countryside areas with smaller towns of fewer people and areas of land used for mining and agriculture. Rural areas may have lower average living costs.



Housing

The type of housing you choose will depend on your personal needs and the options available.

- Which housing option is best for you?
  - ☐ **On-campus Housing**
    Married Student Housing
    - 〉 Demand for housing for married couples is usually high, so you should ask about this as early as possible.

  - ☐ **Off-campus Housing**
    Apartments
    - 〉 The student finds his/her own apartment and typically pays a deposit, monthly rent, and utility fees. 'Co-op' Housing
    - 〉 Co-ops are usually large houses where a group of students live together, sharing the costs and taking turns to do the cooking and cleaning. American Host Family
    - 〉 Living with an American family can be an enriching experience and can be less expensive than other off-campus housing options.
    - 〉 Host family options may not be available at all colleges or universities, so it is important to check with the campus adviser if you are interested.

Campus Life

Activities available in the local area may also be an important part of your U.S. experience. Will you be in a location that offers activities that interest you?

- Which activities will you want to be able to access?
  - ☐ **Sports**
    Which ones?

  - ☐ **Arts**
    Which ones?

  - ☐ **Clubs and organizations**
    Which ones?

  - ☐ **Hobbies**
    Which ones?

  - ☐ **Other**