Define Your Priorities

When searching for an undergraduate 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 reasons to study at a college or university in the United States. These reasons may change over time, but they will help guide your search for a U.S. college or university.

***As you begin to search for a U.S. college or university, you should think about*:**

Your Short-term Goals

- Which subjects interest you the most? For example, art, music, science, technology, etc.

- Which degree will you seek in the United States?
  - ☐ **Associate degree** (2-year) - A degree awarded after a two-year period of study; it can be either *terminal* or *transfer* (the first two years of a bachelor's degree).
  - ☐ **Bachelor's degree** (4-year) - A degree awarded upon completion of approximately four years of full-time study.
  - ☐ **Undecided**

- During which time of the year do you want to begin your studies in the United States?
  - ☐ **August/September**
  - ☐ **January**
  - ☐ **May/June**
  - ☐ **Undecided**

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?

- Do you plan to begin a graduate or other academic program after completing your bachelor's degree in the United States?
  - ☐ **Yes, What is your plan?**
  - ☐ **No**
  - ☐ **Undecided**

Your Past Experience

- Have you taken any classes or earned any degrees beyond secondary/high school?

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 website 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 undergraduate level.

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

Education USA

- ☐ **U.S. College or University** Scholarship - Many U.S. institutions offer scholarships for a number of reasons. These financial awards are given to the most highly qualified applicants. From this list, select any that may apply to you and explain why you qualify.

- ☐ **Financial Need** - Financial need is usually determined by low income, economic hardship, or other factors.
  - 〉 List reasons why a college or university should consider your financial situation, or "financial need."

- ☐ **Academic Merit** - Think about your academic achievements, typically earned in a classroom through good grades, high test scores, and other successes.
  - 〉 List any achievements and/or awards you have earned.

- ☐ **Sports** - Think about your special talents in a sport, typically displayed during competitive events.
  - 〉 List any achievements and awards you have in a sport.

- ☐ **Musical Talent** - Think about your special talents in music, typically displayed during musical performances.
  - 〉 List any special achievements and awards you have in music.

- ☐ **Leadership Skills** - Think about your leadership skills, typically displayed during participation in a club or organization.
  - 〉 List any special achievements and awards you have in leadership.

- ☐ **Other Reasons**
  - 〉 List any other personal attributes, skills, and/or talents that you feel should be considered for financial aid. For example, community service, volunteerism, or other types of activities.

- ☐ **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**
- 〉 A very limited amount of funding is available from U.S. government sources to undergraduate 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?

There are more than 4,900 accredited colleges and universities in the United States.

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

Type of Institution

Both 2- and 4-year institutions in the United States offer undergraduate students several options based on your individual needs.

- From this list, which type of institution interests you?

☐ **2-year Institution**

Also known as community colleges, these institutions are for undergraduate students who want:
- 〉 An associate degree.
- 〉 Academic credit towards a bachelor's degree.
  Earning academic credit at a community college, which is usually less expensive, can help lower the overall cost of a bachelor's degree. Community colleges may also offer a more flexible admissions process.

☐ **4-year Institution**

Undergraduate students at four-year colleges and universities may pursue:
- 〉 Short-term exchange.
- 〉 Bachelor's degree.
- 〉 Graduate level study after completing a bachelor's degree.

☐ **Both**
- 〉 Think about both two-year and four-year institutions if you are looking for specific academic programs or financial assistance.

Selectivity

The selectivity of an institution is the total percentage of applicants who are accepted. This can vary depending on how competitive the applicants are. Some highly selective institutions accept less than 10% of applicants, and other less selective institutions accept more than 80% of applicants.

How competitive you are will often depend on your academic grades and test scores. Think about your secondary/high school performance and answer each question in this list.

High School Performance

How does your local school system measure academic performance in secondary/high school? This could be a **grade point average (GPA*),** percentile average, national 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 in secondary/high school 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 U.S. college or university admission tests have you taken?
  - ☐ **SAT Reasoning** Test (or practice test) A primarily multiple-choice test of mathematics and English that is used for admission into an undergraduate program.

    Score

  - ☐ **SAT Subject** Tests (or practice test) A multiple-choice test that measures your knowledge in specific subject areas.

    Score

☐ **ACT + Writing Test** (or practice test) Multiple-choice test which consists of English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning (plus an optional writing component) used for admission into undergraduate programs.
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.

  - ☐ **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**

Education USA

〉 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**

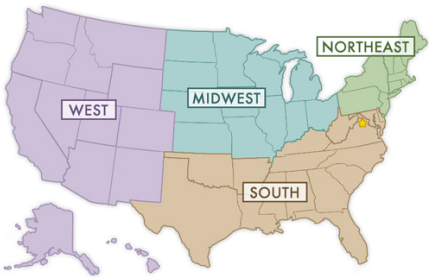
〉 Also called "Middle America," it is known for low-lying plains, small hills, and access to large freshwater lakes bordering Canada. Seasonal climate change, ranging from mild summers to cold winters with heavy snowfall, is also common in the Midwestern states.

☐ **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.

☐ **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.



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**

Residence Halls and Dormitories

- Furnished with basic needs such as a bed, closet, desk, and chair. Rooms are usually shared with other students and can be a great place to meet new friends quickly.
- Some dormitories may be for men only or women only, and some may allow both men and women in the same dormitory residence.

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