



USA Study Guide for International Students

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1. Introduction

This comprehensive guide is designed to help international students navigate the process of studying in the United States. The USA hosts over one million international students annually, offering world-class education across thousands of institutions. This guide contains official, verified information to help you make informed decisions about your educational journey in the United States.

2. Education System in the USA

Undergraduate Education

- Associate Degrees: 2-year programs typically offered at community colleges
- Bachelor's Degrees: 4-year programs offered at colleges and universities
- Academic Calendar: Most institutions follow either semester (Fall/Spring) or quarter systems
- Credit System: Courses are assigned credit hours (typically 3-4 per course)
- General Education Requirements: Liberal arts foundation required before specialization
- Major/Minor: Area of specialization (major) with possible secondary focus (minor)

Graduate Education

- Master's Degrees: 1-3 year specialized programs
- Doctoral Degrees (Ph.D.): 4-7 year research-intensive programs
- Professional Degrees: Specialized degrees in fields like medicine (MD), law (JD), business (MBA)
- Research vs. Professional Focus: Programs may emphasize academic research or professional practice

Key Differences from Other Countries

- Emphasis on classroom participation and continuous assessment
- Flexibility in course selection
- Liberal arts focus at undergraduate level
- Close faculty-student interaction
- Credit-based graduation requirements rather than final examinations

3. Choosing the Right Institution

Types of Institutions

- **Public Universities:** State-funded institutions with lower tuition for state residents
- **Private Universities:** Independently funded institutions with typically higher tuition
- **Liberal Arts Colleges:** Undergraduate-focused institutions emphasizing broad education
- **Community Colleges:** Two-year institutions offering associate degrees and transfer options
- **Research Universities:** Institutions with extensive research activities and graduate programs
- **Technical/Specialized Institutions:** Focus on specific fields like engineering or arts

Accreditation

Always verify that your chosen institution is accredited by recognized accrediting bodies:

- **Regional Accreditation:** The highest form of institutional accreditation (e.g., Middle States Commission on Higher Education)
- **Programmatic Accreditation:** Field-specific accreditation (e.g., AACSB for business programs)

Verify accreditation status through:

- [Council for Higher Education Accreditation \(CHEA\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Database](#)

Rankings and Reputation

While rankings can provide guidance, consider them as just one factor:

- [U.S. News & World Report Rankings](#)
- [Times Higher Education World University Rankings](#)
- [QS World University Rankings](#)

Selection Factors

Consider these factors when choosing institutions:

- Academic programs and specializations available
- Location and surrounding community
- Size and campus environment
- Research opportunities
- Internship and job placement records
- Support services for international students
- Cost and financial aid availability
- Climate and geography

4. Application Process

Undergraduate Applications

- Common Application: Platform used by 900+ institutions ([CommonApp.org](https://commonapp.org))
- Coalition Application: Alternative platform used by 150+ institutions
- Institutional Applications: Some universities have their own application systems

Required Documents

- Completed application form
- Application fee (\$50-\$100 per institution)
- Official high school transcripts (translated if not in English)
- Standardized test scores (SAT/ACT)
- English proficiency test scores (TOEFL/IELTS/Duolingo)
- Letters of recommendation (typically 2-3)
- Personal statement/essays
- Resume/activities list
- Financial documentation
- Portfolio (for arts programs)

Graduate Applications

Required Documents

- Completed application form
- Application fee (\$70-\$120 per institution)
- Official undergraduate transcripts
- Standardized test scores (GRE/GMAT/LSAT/MCAT as applicable)
- English proficiency test scores (TOEFL/IELTS/Duolingo)

- Statement of purpose/research proposal
- Letters of recommendation (typically 3)
- Resume/CV
- Writing samples (for some programs)
- Portfolio (for arts/architecture programs)
- Interview (for some programs)

Application Timeline

Undergraduate:

- Spring entry: Application deadlines typically July-September
- Fall entry: Early decision/action: November (binding/non-binding)
- Fall entry: Regular decision: January-March
- Admission decisions: March-April for fall enrollment
- Enrollment deposit deadline: May 1 for most institutions

Graduate:

- Deadlines vary significantly by program and institution
- PhD programs: December-January for fall enrollment
- Master's programs: December-March for fall enrollment
- Rolling admissions: First-come, first-served until spots are filled

Application Tips

- Start 12-18 months before intended enrollment
- Research each institution's specific requirements
- Take required tests early to allow for retakes
- Request documents and recommendations well in advance
- Prepare different essays for different programs
- Apply to a range of institutions (reach, match, and safety schools)
- Check application status regularly after submission
- Respond promptly to requests for additional information

5. Standardized Tests

Undergraduate Tests

SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test)

- Format: Reading, Writing & Language, Math (Essay optional)
- Score range: 400-1600 (200-800 per section)
- Registration: [College Board](https://collegeboard.org)
- Fee: \$55 (international fee additional \$43-53)

- Test dates: Multiple times per year
- Results available: 2-3 weeks after test date

ACT (American College Testing)

- Format: English, Mathematics, Reading, Science (Essay optional)
- Score range: 1-36 (composite average of sections)
- Registration: [ACT.org](https://act.org)
- Fee: \$63 (international fee additional \$37-57)
- Test dates: Multiple times per year
- Results available: 2-4 weeks after test date

Graduate Tests

GRE (Graduate Record Examination)

- Format: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, Analytical Writing
- Score range: 130-170 (Verbal/Quant), 0-6 (Writing)
- Registration: [ETS](https://ets.org)
- Fee: \$220
- Test availability: Year-round by appointment
- Results available: 10-15 days after test date

GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test)

- Format: Analytical Writing Assessment, Integrated Reasoning, Quantitative, Verbal
- Score range: 200-800 (total), with separate section scores
- Registration: [MBA.com](https://mba.com)
- Fee: \$275
- Test availability: Year-round by appointment
- Results available: Immediately after test

LSAT (Law School Admission Test)

- Format: Reading Comprehension, Logical Reasoning, Analytical Reasoning
- Score range: 120-180
- Registration: [LSAC](https://lsac.org)
- Fee: \$200
- Test dates: Multiple times per year
- Results available: 3-4 weeks after test date

MCAT (Medical College Admission Test)

- Format: Biological Sciences, Physical Sciences, Verbal Reasoning, Psychological/Social

- Score range: 472-528
- Registration: [AAMC](#)
- Fee: \$325
- Test dates: Multiple dates January-September
- Results available: 30-35 days after test date

English Proficiency Tests

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

- Format: Reading, Listening, Speaking, Writing
- Score range: 0-120 (total), 0-30 (per section)
- Registration: [ETS](#)
- Fee: \$185-\$245 (varies by location)
- Test availability: Year-round by appointment
- Results available: 6-10 days after test date

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

- Format: Listening, Reading, Writing, Speaking
- Score range: 0-9 (band score)
- Registration: [IELTS](#)
- Fee: \$215-\$245 (varies by location)
- Test dates: Multiple times per month
- Results available: 13 days after test date

Duolingo English Test

- Format: Online adaptive test with reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- Score range: 10-160
- Registration: [Duolingo](#)
- Fee: \$49
- Test availability: On-demand
- Results available: 48 hours after test completion

Test Preparation Resources

- Official test preparation materials from test providers
- Khan Academy (free SAT preparation)
- Commercial preparation books (Princeton Review, Kaplan, Barron's)
- Preparation courses (both online and in-person)
- Practice tests under timed conditions
- Online forums and study groups

6. Student Visas

Types of Student Visas

F-1 Visa

- For academic studies at accredited colleges, universities, and language programs
- Allows for full-time study
- Limited work authorization
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

J-1 Visa

- For exchange visitor programs
- Sponsored by approved organizations
- May have two-year home residency requirement
- [Official State Department Information](#)

M-1 Visa

- For vocational or non-academic studies
- Very limited work authorization
- Maximum stay based on program length
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

Visa Application Process

1. Get accepted by a SEVP-certified institution
2. Pay SEVIS fee (\$350 for F-1/M-1, \$220 for J-1) at [FMJfee.com](https://fmjfee.com)
3. Receive I-20 (F-1/M-1) or DS-2019 (J-1) from your institution
4. Complete DS-160 online visa application at ceac.state.gov
5. Pay visa application fee (\$160)
6. Schedule visa interview at local U.S. Embassy/Consulate
7. Attend interview with required documents:
 - Valid passport (valid 6+ months beyond intended stay)
 - Form I-20 or DS-2019
 - DS-160 confirmation page
 - Visa application fee receipt
 - SEVIS fee receipt
 - Academic transcripts/test scores
 - Financial evidence showing sufficient funds
 - Ties to home country documentation
 - Passport-size photographs

Visa Interview Tips

- Demonstrate strong ties to your home country
- Clearly articulate your study plans and career goals
- Provide concrete evidence of financial support
- Be concise and honest in your answers
- Bring all required documentation in organized manner
- Dress professionally and arrive early

Maintaining Visa Status

- Maintain full-time enrollment
- Make normal academic progress
- Limit on-campus employment to 20 hours/week during academic terms
- Get authorization before any off-campus employment
- Keep passport and visa documents valid
- Notify DSO (Designated School Official) of any changes in:
 - Address (within 10 days)
 - Major or program
 - Funding sources
 - Academic status

Post-Completion Options

Optional Practical Training (OPT) - F-1 Visa

- Up to 12 months of work authorization in field of study
- STEM graduates eligible for 24-month extension
- Must apply before program completion
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

Academic Training - J-1 Visa

- Work authorization for up to 18 months (or 36 months for postdoctoral training)
- Must be directly related to field of study
- Must apply before program completion

7. Financial Planning

Education Costs

Undergraduate Annual Costs (2024-2025 estimates)

- Public universities (in-state): \$10,000-\$15,000 tuition
- Public universities (out-of-state): \$25,000-\$40,000 tuition
- Private universities: \$35,000-\$60,000 tuition
- Community colleges: \$3,000-\$10,000 tuition

Graduate Annual Costs (2024-2025 estimates)

- Public universities: \$15,000-\$30,000 tuition
- Private universities: \$30,000-\$60,000 tuition
- Professional programs (Law, Medicine, MBA): \$45,000-\$80,000 tuition

Additional Costs (Annual)

- Room and board: \$10,000-\$20,000
- Books and supplies: \$1,000-\$2,000
- Health insurance: \$1,500-\$3,000
- Personal expenses: \$2,000-\$3,000
- Transportation: \$1,000-\$3,000
- SEVIS fee: \$350 (one-time)
- Visa application fee: \$160 (one-time)

Financial Aid for International Students

Institutional Aid

- Merit scholarships
- Need-based scholarships (limited availability)
- Athletic scholarships
- Talent-based scholarships
- Graduate assistantships/fellowships

External Funding Sources

- Fulbright Program: [Foreign Student Program](#)
- Aga Khan Foundation: [International Scholarship Programme](#)
- AMIDEAST: [Education and Training Programs](#)
- EducationUSA: [Financial Assistance Resources](#)
- Home country government scholarships
- Regional scholarship programs
- Corporate sponsorships
- International organizations (UN, World Bank, etc.)

Graduate Funding

- Teaching Assistantships (TA positions)
- Research Assistantships (RA positions)
- Fellowships
- Department-specific grants

Banking and Money Management

- Opening a U.S. bank account:
 - Required documents: Passport, I-20/DS-2019, student ID, proof of address
 - Recommended banks with student-friendly options: Bank of America, Chase, Wells Fargo, Citibank
 - Consider online banks with lower fees: Ally, Capital One
- Money transfer options:
 - Wire transfers (can be expensive)
 - Online services (TransferWise/Wise, Remitly, OFX)
 - Foreign exchange students services (Flywire)
- Building credit history:
 - Secured credit cards
 - Student credit cards
 - Credit-builder loans
 - Reporting rent payments to credit bureaus
- Tax obligations:
 - File annual tax return even with no income
 - Form 8843 required for all international students
 - Form 1040NR if you earned U.S. income
 - Tax treaties may reduce tax liability

8. Accommodation Options

On-Campus Housing

- Dormitories/Residence Halls:
 - Single, double, or triple occupancy
 - Communal bathrooms or suite-style
 - Meal plans typically required
 - Built-in community and activities

- Cost: \$8,000-\$15,000 per academic year
- Campus Apartments:
 - More independence
 - Kitchen facilities
 - Typically for upperclassmen/graduate students
 - Cost: \$8,000-\$18,000 per academic year
- Family Housing:
 - Available at some universities for married students or those with children
 - Limited availability, apply early
 - Cost: \$10,000-\$20,000 per academic year

Off-Campus Housing

- Apartments:
 - Studio/1-bedroom: \$800-\$2,500+ monthly (location dependent)
 - 2+ bedrooms (for sharing): \$1,200-\$4,000+ monthly
 - Additional costs: utilities, internet, furniture
- Shared Houses:
 - Renting a room in shared house
 - Cost: \$500-\$1,500+ monthly (location dependent)
 - Social environment with shared spaces
- Homestays:
 - Living with local family
 - May include meals
 - Cultural immersion opportunity
 - Cost: \$800-\$2,000 monthly (including meals)

Finding Accommodation

- University housing office
- University-affiliated off-campus housing services
- Online platforms:
 - [Apartments.com](https://www.apartments.com)
 - [Zillow](https://www.zillow.com)
 - [Craigslist](https://www.craigslist.org) (use caution)
 - [Facebook Marketplace](https://www.facebook.com/marketplace)
- International student groups
- Local newspaper classifieds

Housing Considerations

- Proximity to campus
- Public transportation access
- Safety of neighborhood
- Lease terms (9-month vs. 12-month)
- Furnished vs. unfurnished
- Utilities included vs. separate
- Internet/cable availability
- Laundry facilities
- Security features
- Pet policies (if applicable)

Legal Protections and Advice

- Read lease carefully before signing
- Understand security deposit requirements and conditions
- Document apartment condition at move-in (photos)
- Know your rights as a tenant (varies by state)
- Consider renter's insurance
- University legal services for students
- Fair Housing Act protections against discrimination

9. Healthcare in the USA

Health Insurance Requirements

- Most institutions require proof of health insurance
- Waiver process if you have alternative coverage
- F-1 and J-1 visa holders must meet minimum coverage requirements
- J-1 visa specific insurance requirements:
 - Medical benefits of at least \$100,000 per accident or illness
 - Repatriation of remains coverage of \$25,000
 - Medical evacuation coverage of \$50,000
 - Deductible not exceeding \$500 per accident or illness

Insurance Options

- University-sponsored plans:
 - Comprehensive coverage designed for students
 - Cost: \$1,500-\$3,000 annually
 - Convenient on-campus services
 - Pre-negotiated rates with local providers

- Private insurance plans:
 - Companies offering international student plans:
 - [ISO](#)
 - [PSI](#)
 - [GeoBlue](#)
 - Consider coverage limits, deductibles, and exclusions
- Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace:
 - Available to certain visa holders
 - Subsidies typically not available to international students
 - [Healthcare.gov](#)

Understanding U.S. Healthcare Terms

- Premium: Monthly cost of insurance
- Deductible: Amount you pay before insurance begins covering
- Copayment: Fixed amount you pay for services
- Coinsurance: Percentage you pay after meeting deductible
- Out-of-pocket maximum: Maximum you'll pay annually
- Network: Providers contracted with insurance company
- Preauthorization: Required approval before certain procedures

Accessing Healthcare

- Student Health Center:
 - On-campus medical facility
 - Low or no cost basic services
 - Convenient location and hours
 - Familiar with international student needs
- Primary Care Physician (PCP):
 - Main doctor for non-emergency care
 - Referrals to specialists if needed
 - Regular check-ups and preventive care
 - Find in-network providers through insurance website
- Urgent Care Centers:
 - Walk-in clinics for non-life-threatening conditions
 - Extended hours, including weekends
 - Less expensive than emergency rooms
 - Faster than emergency rooms for non-critical issues

- Emergency Rooms (ER):
 - For serious or life-threatening conditions
 - Open 24/7
 - Highest level of care
 - Most expensive option (\$1,000+ for visit)
- Telemedicine:
 - Virtual appointments via video/phone
 - Convenient for minor conditions
 - Often lower copays than in-person visits
 - Check if covered by your insurance

Mental Health Resources

- University counseling centers
- International student support groups
- Telehealth mental health services
- Crisis text line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 or 1-800-273-8255

Prescription Medications

- Check if medications from home country are available in the U.S.
- Bring copy of prescriptions using generic names
- Some medications may require U.S. prescription
- Consider mail-order pharmacy options
- Prescription discount cards (GoodRx, SingleCare)

10. Cultural Adjustment

Understanding U.S. Culture

- Individualism: Emphasis on self-reliance and personal achievement
- Informality: Casual interactions, first-name basis common
- Time consciousness: Punctuality valued in academic and professional settings
- Direct communication: Explicit rather than implicit communication style
- Active class participation: Expected to engage and share opinions
- Academic integrity: Strict policies on plagiarism and cheating
- Diversity: Varies significantly by region and institution

Common Challenges

- Language barriers: Even with strong English skills, idioms and slang can be challenging
- Academic expectations: Different teaching and learning styles
- Homesickness: Missing family, friends, food, and familiar surroundings
- Social customs: Different norms for friendship, dating, and social interactions
- Culture shock phases: Honeymoon, crisis, recovery, adjustment
- Regional differences: U.S. culture varies significantly by region

Adjustment Strategies

- Pre-arrival preparation: Research U.S. culture and your specific institution
- Orientation programs: Participate fully in international student orientation
- Buddy/mentor programs: Connect with current students
- Student organizations: Join international student associations and interest-based clubs
- Cultural events: Attend both American and multicultural campus events
- Language partners: Practice English with native speakers
- Cultural exchange programs: Volunteer to share your culture

Support Resources

- International Student Office
- Cultural centers on campus
- Counseling services
- Academic advisors
- Resident advisors (in dormitories)
- Student organizations
- Religious/spiritual communities
- Community cultural organizations

11. Working While Studying

On-Campus Employment

F-1 Visa Students

- May work up to 20 hours per week during academic terms
- May work full-time during official breaks
- No special authorization required
- Must maintain full-time student status
- Common jobs: library, dining services, research assistants, administrative offices

J-1 Visa Students

- Similar to F-1, but may need authorization from program sponsor
- Must be in good academic standing
- Check with your J-1 program sponsor for specific guidelines

Off-Campus Employment Options

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) - F-1 Students

- Must be integral part of established curriculum
- Must receive course credit
- Must have completed one academic year
- Authorization from DSO required
- Appears on I-20
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) - F-1 Students

- 12 months of work authorization per educational level
- STEM degrees eligible for 24-month extension
- Must be directly related to major
- Requires USCIS approval (2-5 month processing)
- Can be used pre-completion or post-completion
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

Academic Training - J-1 Students

- Work directly related to field of study
- Authorization from program sponsor required
- Available during or after program
- Duration depends on program length (typically 18 months, 36 for doctoral students)

Severe Economic Hardship - F-1 Students

- Must have unforeseen economic circumstances
- Must have been in F-1 status for one academic year
- Must prove on-campus employment is unavailable or insufficient
- USCIS application required with fee
- Limited to 20 hours per week during academic terms

Finding Jobs

- University career services center
- Campus job fairs
- Online job boards (Handshake, Indeed, LinkedIn)
- Networking with professors and alumni

- Professional associations in your field
- Department bulletin boards and email lists

Tax Implications

- Most international students are "non-resident aliens" for tax purposes
- Required to file annual tax returns (even with no income)
- Tax treaties between U.S. and home country may provide benefits
- Social Security and Medicare taxes exemption for F-1/J-1 students
- University tax workshops or international student office can provide guidance
- IRS resources for international students: [IRS Foreign Students](#)

12. Post-Graduation Options

Work Authorization

Optional Practical Training (OPT) - F-1 Students

- 12 months of work authorization
- STEM extension for additional 24 months
- Must apply before program completion
- Requires EAD (Employment Authorization Document)
- Must be directly related to field of study
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

H-1B Visa

- Employer-sponsored work visa
- Annual quota with lottery system
- Requires bachelor's degree minimum
- Initial period of 3 years, extendable to 6 years
- Dual intent (can pursue permanent residency)
- Application window opens April 1 each year
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

O-1 Visa

- For individuals with extraordinary ability
- No annual cap
- Initial period of 3 years with extensions
- Requires substantial evidence of achievement
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

Other Work Visa Categories

- E-3 (Australian citizens)
- TN (Canadian and Mexican citizens under USMCA)
- L-1 (Intracompany transfers)
- E-2 (Treaty investors)

Further Education

- Advanced degrees (Master's, PhD)
- Professional degrees (JD, MD, MBA)
- Certificate programs
- Post-baccalaureate programs
- Research positions
- Each level allows for new OPT eligibility

Permanent Residency Pathways

- Employment-based green cards (EB-1, EB-2, EB-3)
- National Interest Waiver
- Diversity Visa Lottery
- Family sponsorship
- Investment-based (EB-5)
- Asylum or refugee status
- Country-specific programs
- [Official USCIS Information](#)

Returning Home

- Alumni networks in home country
- Career services for international job search
- Transferable skills and experiences
- U.S. multinational companies with operations in home country
- Government initiatives to attract returning graduates
- Educational equivalency documentation

13. Resources and Support

Official Government Resources

- [EducationUSA](#) - U.S. Department of State network of advising centers
- [Study in the States](#) - Department of Homeland Security information
- [U.S. Department of Education](#) - International affairs office
- [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) - Visa information
- [U.S. Embassies and Consulates](#) - Visa processing and local resources

Academic Resources

- [College Board](#) - Information on colleges and the SAT
- [Common Application](#) - Application platform for 900+ schools
- [Peterson's](#) - College search and preparation resources
- [National Association for College Admission Counseling](#) - Student resources
- [Council of Graduate Schools](#) - Graduate education resources

Financial Resources

- [International Education Financial Aid](#) - Scholarship database
- [Fulbright Foreign Student Program](#) - Prestigious scholarships
- [Institute of International Education](#) - Scholarship administrator
- [FastWeb](#) - Scholarship search engine
- [International Student Loan](#) - Financing options

Student Support Organizations

- [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#) - Resources and advocacy
- [International Student Insurance](#) - Insurance information
- [International Student](#) - Comprehensive resource website
- [Study Abroad](#) - Programs and resources directory
- [Poets & Quants](#) - Business school information

Mental Health and Well-being

- [Active Minds](#) - Mental health resources for students
- [Student Mental Health Association](#) - Support networks
- [International Association of Counseling Services](#) - College counseling centers
- [ULifeline](#) - College mental health resources
- [7 Cups](#) - Free online counseling and support

Test Preparation Resources

- [Official SAT Practice](#) - Free SAT prep from Khan Academy
- [ETS GRE and TOEFL](#) - Official preparation materials
- [GMAC GMAT](#) - Official GMAT preparation materials
- [LSAC LSAT](#) - Official LSAT preparation materials
- [AAMC MCAT](#) - Official MCAT preparation materials
- [Duolingo English Test](#) - Practice tests and resources

Career Development Resources

- [LinkedIn](#) - Professional networking platform
- [Handshake](#) - University career platform

- [Indeed](#) - Job search engine
- [Glassdoor](#) - Company reviews and salary information
- [CareerBuilder](#) - Job listings and career advice
- [O*NET OnLine](#) - Occupational information network
- [Vault](#) - Career intelligence
- [myVisaJobs](#) - H-1B visa job information

14. Regional Considerations

Geographic Regions

Northeast

- Oldest universities and prestigious Ivy League institutions
- Dense urban environments with excellent public transportation
- Four distinct seasons with cold, snowy winters
- Higher cost of living, especially in metropolitan areas
- Strong industries: finance, education, healthcare, technology
- States: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania

Midwest

- Large public research universities
- Mix of urban centers and rural communities
- Four distinct seasons with cold winters
- Lower cost of living compared to coasts
- Strong industries: manufacturing, agriculture, healthcare
- States: Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas

South

- Mix of public and private institutions
- Warmer climate with mild winters
- Lower cost of living in many areas
- Strong regional culture and hospitality
- Strong industries: energy, healthcare, tourism, aerospace
- States: Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas

West

- Innovation hubs and technology centers

- Diverse geography from deserts to mountains
- Climate varies from Mediterranean to alpine
- Higher cost of living in coastal areas
- Strong industries: technology, entertainment, tourism, agriculture
- States: Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Utah, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Alaska, Hawaii

Urban vs. Rural Institutions

Urban Universities

- More internship and networking opportunities
- Better public transportation
- Greater cultural diversity and amenities
- Higher cost of living
- Examples: NYU, Boston University, University of Chicago

Suburban Universities

- Balance between accessibility and campus focus
- Often sprawling campuses with comprehensive facilities
- Moderate cost of living
- Examples: Northwestern University, Stanford University, Emory University

Rural Universities

- Strong campus community focus
- Lower cost of living
- Often picturesque settings
- Limited public transportation
- Examples: Dartmouth College, University of Vermont, Cornell University

Climate Considerations

- Northeast: Four seasons with cold, snowy winters and warm summers
- Midwest: Continental climate with very cold winters, hot summers, and sudden weather changes
- Southeast: Humid subtropical climate with mild winters and hot, humid summers
- Southwest: Arid to semi-arid with hot summers and mild winters
- West Coast: Mediterranean climate (CA) to temperate rainforest (WA/OR)
- Hawaii: Tropical climate year-round
- Alaska: Subarctic with very cold winters and cool summers

15. Daily Life in the USA

Transportation

Public Transportation

- Urban areas: Extensive public transportation (subway, bus, light rail)
- Suburban/rural areas: Limited public transportation options
- Student discounts often available with college ID
- Apps like Google Maps, Transit, and Moovit help navigate systems

Driving

- International driver's permit recommended (obtain before arrival)
- State driver's license requirements vary
- Car ownership costs: insurance, maintenance, parking, fuel
- Car-sharing services (Zipcar) available on many campuses
- Used cars: \$5,000-\$15,000 for reliable used vehicle

Other Options

- Rideshare services (Uber, Lyft) widely available
- Bicycle-friendly campuses and cities (with varying infrastructure)
- Electric scooters in many urban areas
- Walking is viable on and around most campuses

Mobile Phone Service

- Major carriers: Verizon, AT&T, T-Mobile
- Budget options: Mint Mobile, Cricket, Metro by T-Mobile
- Plans typically \$30-\$90 monthly
- International calling plans or apps (WhatsApp, Skype)
- Consider unlocked phones that work with U.S. carriers
- Most plans include unlimited talk/text with varying data allowances

Internet Services

- Campus Wi-Fi freely available
- Off-campus internet providers vary by location
- Cost: \$40-\$80 monthly for high-speed service
- Installation may require SSN or higher deposits for international students
- Some providers offer student discounts

Safety Considerations

- Campus security services (escorts, emergency phones, alerts)
- Register for university emergency notification systems
- U.S. emergency number: 911 (police, fire, medical)
- Research neighborhood safety before choosing housing
- Campus safety resources: blue light emergency phones, security shuttles
- Be aware of campus and community safety resources

Shopping and Consumer Basics

- Grocery stores: national chains (Kroger, Safeway, Walmart) and local options
- Retail: department stores, malls, online retailers
- Online shopping: Amazon, Walmart, Target with delivery to campus
- Thrift stores for budget-friendly options
- International grocery stores in most college towns
- Consumer protection laws and return policies generally favorable

American Academic Culture

- Active class participation expected and often graded
- Office hours for one-on-one help from professors
- Group projects and collaborative work common
- Academic integrity strictly enforced
- Grade culture (GPA focus) more prominent than in many countries
- Relationships with professors more informal than in many countries
- Writing centers and tutoring typically available for free

Social Customs and Etiquette

- Punctuality important for classes and appointments
- Personal space (3-4 feet) larger than in many cultures
- Tipping expected in restaurants (15-20%), taxis, salons
- Greeting styles: handshakes common, hugs among friends
- Addressing professors varies (Dr./Professor/first name)
- Direct communication generally valued
- Diversity of practices across regions and demographics

16. Pre-Departure Preparations

Essential Documents

- Valid passport (valid at least 6 months beyond intended stay)
- Visa documentation (I-20 or DS-2019)
- Acceptance letters and admissions correspondence
- Financial documentation

- Health records and vaccination certificates
- Prescription medications (with doctor's letter)
- International driver's license (if planning to drive)
- Academic records (original and translated copies)
- Birth certificate and/or marriage certificate (if applicable)
- Health insurance documentation

Pre-Departure Checklist

- 3-6 months before departure:
 - Apply for passport if needed (allow 8-12 weeks)
 - Apply for visa (schedule interview early)
 - Research housing options
 - Research health insurance options
 - Get required vaccinations
 - Research banking options
- 1-3 months before departure:
 - Book flights (aim for arrival before orientation)
 - Arrange temporary and long-term accommodation
 - Contact international student office about airport pickup
 - Register for orientation
 - Research phone plans
 - Join social media groups for incoming students
 - Check baggage allowance for airline
- 2-4 weeks before departure:
 - Notify bank of travel plans
 - Exchange some currency (bring \$200-\$300 cash)
 - Make copies of important documents
 - Set up communication plan with family
 - Pack appropriately for climate
 - Arrange transportation from airport to campus
 - Confirm housing arrangements

Packing Considerations

- Essential items:
 - Important documents (in carry-on)
 - Prescription medications (in original containers with documentation)
 - Appropriate clothing for climate
 - Adaptors for electronics (U.S. uses 110-120V)

- Basic toiletries until local shopping possible
 - Photos and mementos from home
- Items to buy in the U.S.:
 - Bedding and linens (may have different sizes)
 - Winter clothing (if applicable)
 - Large electronics
 - School supplies
 - Kitchenware
 - Furniture
- Cultural items to consider bringing:
 - Traditional clothing for cultural events
 - Non-perishable traditional foods (check customs regulations)
 - Small items representing your culture to share

Arrival Procedures

- Immigration process at port of entry
- Required documents for customs
- Transportation to campus
- Check-in with international student office
- Mandatory SEVIS registration
- Orientation schedules
- Setting up essential services (banking, phone, etc.)
- Campus tour and resource familiarization

17. Technology and Digital Resources

Learning Management Systems

- Common platforms: Canvas, Blackboard, Moodle, Brightspace
- Used for course materials, assignments, grades, discussions
- Mobile apps available for most platforms
- Training typically provided during orientation

Library Resources

- Digital catalogs and databases
- Interlibrary loan services
- Research assistance
- Study spaces and computer access
- Digital media production resources
- Subject specialist librarians

Academic Software

- Microsoft Office 365 or Google Workspace (typically provided free)
- Field-specific software (often available through university licenses)
- Statistical packages (SPSS, SAS, Stata, R)
- Design software (Adobe Creative Cloud)
- Citation management (Zotero, Mendeley, EndNote)
- Programming environments

Digital Privacy and Security

- Campus Wi-Fi security best practices
- VPN services (often provided by universities)
- Data protection regulations
- Password management
- Avoiding phishing and scams targeting students

Accessibility Resources

- Assistive technologies available through most universities
- Accommodation request procedures
- Note-taking services
- Extended testing time arrangements
- Text-to-speech and speech-to-text software
- Accessible course materials

18. State-Specific Information

While the United States has federal laws and regulations that apply nationwide, individual states may have different requirements, opportunities, and resources for international students. Some key areas to research for your specific destination state include:

- Driver's license requirements
- State-specific scholarship opportunities
- In-state tuition eligibility criteria
- Healthcare resources
- State-specific internship programs
- Climate and weather patterns
- Cultural and recreational opportunities
- Cost of living variations
- Industry concentrations and job markets
- Public transportation availability

Conclusion

This comprehensive guide provides a foundation for international students planning to study in the United States. While the information presented is accurate as of May 2024, regulations, costs, and procedures may change. Always verify the most current information through official sources like your university's international student office, U.S. government websites, and EducationUSA.

Important Links

- [EducationUSA](#)
- [Study in the States \(DHS\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of State - Student Visas](#)
- [NAFSA: Association of International Educators](#)
- [U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education](#)

Glossary of Terms

- SEVIS: Student and Exchange Visitor Information System
- DSO: Designated School Official
- I-20: Certificate of Eligibility for F-1 visa status
- DS-2019: Certificate of Eligibility for J-1 visa status
- F-1: Student visa for academic studies
- J-1: Exchange visitor visa
- M-1: Student visa for vocational studies
- CPT: Curricular Practical Training
- OPT: Optional Practical Training
- STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
- SEVP: Student and Exchange Visitor Program
- EAD: Employment Authorization Document
- GPA: Grade Point Average
- TA: Teaching Assistant
- RA: Research Assistant
- FERPA: Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (privacy protection for student records)