

Graduate Study in the United States

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A Guide for
Prospective International
Graduate Students



Council of Graduate Schools

GRADUATE STUDY
IN THE UNITED
STATES:

A Guide for Prospective
International Graduate
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COUNCIL OF GRADUATE SCHOOLS

**GRADUATE STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES:
A Guide for Prospective International
Graduate Students**

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FOREWORD

For centuries, students with strong interests in advanced study have traveled to countries that provided outstanding educational opportunities and that welcomed students, whatever their national origin, on the basis of their intellectual achievement and potential. Graduate programs in the United States have welcomed these international students for their academic talents, the unique perspectives they bring to U.S. institutions of higher learning, and for their potential to take the expertise they acquire in graduate degree programs and make a positive impact, both within the U.S. and beyond.

This publication contains basic information about applying to graduate study in the U.S., covering areas such as: selecting the program that is right for you, the application process and requirements, the visa process, financing graduate study, and life as a graduate student in the United States. We believe you will find this guide helpful as you seek to join the international community of scholars and consider continuing your education in the United States.

Debra W. Stewart
President, Council of Graduate Schools

WHY GRADUATE STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES?

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Every year, thousands of students from all over the world come to the United States for graduate study. In 2005 alone, nearly 222,000 international students were enrolled in U.S. graduate schools. They have been attracted by several distinctive features of American graduate education. Perhaps most important, American graduate education is universally perceived to be of very high quality, and graduate degrees earned in the United States are held in esteem throughout the world. In addition, graduate education in the U.S. is a huge enterprise, with approximately 2,000 institutions offering graduate degrees in hundreds of fields of study to over 2,000,000 graduate students.

The large number of programs offered, and the many different kinds of institutions offering them, provide students with a unique opportunity to select the graduate programs that best suit their needs and goals. Furthermore, the high state of development of research facilities, libraries, laboratories, and specialized equipment available in the U.S. ensures that students will have access to the latest techniques and materials needed to do research in their fields. Finally, the large number of graduate students, from many countries, enables individual students to meet and work with future colleagues. The friendships that form in graduate school often extend throughout one's life, and the opportunity to get to know people with similar academic interests from different countries who are doing work in the same field is an invaluable part of graduate education. These connections will prove more valuable over time as opportunities increase for international collaboration.

WHAT IS GRADUATE EDUCATION?

The term graduate education (referred to in many countries as postgraduate education) usually refers to degree-granting programs that require the equivalent of the U.S. baccalaureate degree as the minimum condition defining eligibility for admission. Historically, graduate programs in the United States were those leading to the Master of Arts (M.A.), Master of Science (M.S.), and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees in the arts and sciences. Today, many areas outside of the arts and sciences (e.g., engineering, education, fine arts, business, agriculture) grant one or more of these degrees. In addition, many other master's and doctoral degree programs and titles have been developed (e.g., Master of Business Administration [M.B.A.], Master of Education [M.Ed.], Doctor of Education [Ed.D.], Doctor of Social Work [D.S.W.]). These may be referred to as professional, graduate, or graduate/professional programs, depending on the tradition and administrative organization of the institution that awards the degree. The terms "graduate" and "professional" are sometimes used interchangeably when referring to these programs, and the difference between them is often arbitrary. Most graduate programs tend to be either research or practice-oriented. The central issue in research-oriented programs is the state of knowledge in a discipline; the central issue in practice-oriented programs is the state of practice in a profession.

Graduate education is advanced, focused, and scholarly. It is advanced in the sense that it is based upon the assumption that graduate students have acquired fundamental knowledge, both general and specific, in prior studies. It is focused in that its objective is to deal in depth with a specific discipline or field of study rather than to provide a broad educational experience. It is scholarly in that it is based on the premise of an evolving knowledge base, developed by those in the field and subject to challenge and validation by generally accepted procedures. All graduate students must understand and be able to use that knowledge base; many graduate, and all Ph.D., students must contribute to its development through their own research.

Universities in the United States award approximately 580,000 master's degrees, with 800 to 1,000 different titles, each year. Approximately 20 percent of these degrees are in the arts and sciences, and many of these are designed as preparation for further academic work, usually at the Ph.D. level. The remainder is in what are usually considered professional areas, with business and education accounting for approximately 54 percent and engineering for 6 percent of the degrees awarded. For the most part, these professionally-oriented programs are designed to prepare students for professional practice rather than for further graduate work.

One year of full-time study, or its equivalent, is generally the minimum time period required for completing a master's program if a student does not have teaching or research responsibilities. Many programs, however, may require two or more years of study. The requirements regularly include course work, and often a research component leading to a thesis or research project, as well as a comprehensive examination.

Some programs require completion of a master's degree on the way to a doctoral degree. Others admit only to doctoral programs; this is especially true in the sciences. Approximately 48,500 doctorates are awarded each year in the United States. The vast majority of these are Ph.D.s. The Ph.D. is often referred to as a research doctorate to distinguish it from other doctoral degrees that do not require students to carry out independent research. This requirement forms the cornerstone of the Ph.D. degree. In general, all Ph.D. programs require that students take some advanced course work, including seminars and/or directed readings, pass an examination demonstrating comprehensive knowledge of the field of study, complete an independent research project, and successfully defend that research to a group of established scholars. It usually takes four to six years of full-time study to earn a Ph.D.

Doctoral programs are characterized by the autonomy given to faculty members to design the specific courses and research projects engaged in by students working under their direction. Thus, Ph.D. programs are highly individualized, depending on the scholarly interests of both student and faculty. While the objective of all programs is the same, that is, to produce individuals capable of functioning as independent scholars, there is considerable variation within disciplines and institutions in how that objective is achieved.

In the natural sciences and engineering, and a growing number of fields in the social sciences, the usual pace is for students to become involved quite early in ongoing research projects in their graduate

programs, funded for the most part by grants or contracts obtained by their doctoral advisors, and to gradually develop their own portion of those projects into dissertation topics. Students work closely with their advisors as real collaborators in research, and in some fields, this collaboration extends to other graduate students and postdoctoral research associates as well. Thus, doctoral research may be done as part of a team, with individual students working together on the total project, but defining specific parts that represent their own individual contribution.

In contrast to students in the sciences, those in the humanities usually develop dissertation topics on the general area or in the period of interest of their doctoral advisors, but do not work collaboratively on the research topics of their advisors. Original research may be expected during coursework, but the identification of a dissertation topic and research on that topic typically commences with the student's completion of required coursework.

All Ph.D. programs require each student to prepare a dissertation describing the results of the student's research. The form of that dissertation may vary widely across the disciplines, and it usually reflects research and publication practices within each discipline. In the sciences, dissertations may represent a collection of shorter, interrelated research projects. Results from some of these projects, often done in collaboration with other researchers, may already have been published in the scientific literature. In the humanities, and in some social sciences, a student's dissertation usually represents the results of intense study of a single topic, reported in the form of a manuscript that may eventually be published as a book. The originality and significance of the work, rather than the form in which it is reported, are the primary factors that determine its acceptance for the Ph.D. degree.

Because the goal of professional doctorates is to prepare highly skilled practitioners in professional, generally non-academic fields, graduation requirements generally differ from those of a Ph.D. The culminating experience of a professional doctorate may be a dissertation, or it may include demonstration of clinical proficiency, certification or licensure, or some combination of these.

APPROPRIATE BACKGROUND FOR GRADUATE STUDY

In the United States, each institution offering graduate programs sets its own requirements for admission. In addition, requirements often differ within institutions according to the demands of the various academic programs. Academic skills as demonstrated by a strong performance in your first degree program, positive letters of recommendation from former professors, and, in some cases, good work experience, are the best evidence of your preparation for graduate studies. Scores on standardized tests such as the GRE (Graduate Record Examinations), the GMAT (Graduate Management Aptitude Test), and the MAT (Miller's Analogy Test) may also be important factors for admission into graduate programs. For some programs, such as business, it is probably wise to have work experience after your first degree program before applying for graduate study, especially if the work is in a field of study related to the one in which you wish to study at the graduate level. Some programs in business and other professional schools may require work experience prior to admission.

Admission to a Ph.D. program generally requires completion of a first degree, which is equivalent to a U.S. baccalaureate degree, in a closely related field. Some U.S. institutions will accept graduates from a 3-year postsecondary degree program. Most graduate programs will look at a student's overall potential for success in graduate work, and may look at preparation within fields of study, grades, test scores, writing and research samples, and recommendations to assess that potential. You need to have a strong background in the field of study before you begin advanced study, and it will be helpful for you to have some experience with research. If your field of study is characterized by rapid advances in research or technology (such as computer science or biotechnology), it is strongly advised that you go directly to graduate school rather than interrupt your studies by working. The master's degree can be a way to prepare for the Ph.D., particularly if you wish to make a change from the

subject you initially studied at the postsecondary level, but the master's degree is not always a requirement for entrance into a doctoral program.

You must be able to read, write, speak, and understand the English language at a high level of proficiency. Much of your success will depend on your fluency in English. Most institutions will require you to demonstrate a certain level of English proficiency before you are admitted. This is usually determined by the results of a standardized English proficiency test such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). If you have applied for a teaching assistantship, the Test of Spoken English (TSE) may be required. If you do not have the necessary level of English proficiency, you may be denied admission or required to participate in an intensive English language training program. These programs may be offered by the admitting institution, at another institution, or by private companies. Such training will involve an additional investment of time and money. Some universities may not provide any financial support in the form of fellowships, teaching, or research assistantships until English proficiency is achieved.

SELECTING A GRADUATE PROGRAM

Because there are so many institutions in the U.S. that offer such a variety of graduate degree programs, selecting the ones of interest to you cannot be done without first learning more about specific programs. Your selection criteria should include the “content” (such as coursework) of the degree program and related programs, research focus, institutional and faculty quality, and availability of major library holdings, research equipment, and other important facilities. Other factors that may be considered are the availability of financial support, services for international students, and geographic location.

You need to do your research carefully to choose the institution that will best suit your needs and talents. Many are highly specialized and offer only one kind of degree. Some may offer one or two professional master’s degrees, often in education or business administration. Some institutions offer master’s degrees only, while others offer doctorates as well as master’s degrees in selected fields. Then there are major research universities that offer master’s degrees and doctorates in a wide range of fields, but sub-specialties within these fields may differ among institutions.

One way to do research on graduate programs is to talk to professors at your own institution about what they know about graduate programs in their fields. Often, your professors can recommend professors at other institutions with whom you should study. Friends who have completed studies in the U.S. can also give you information about choosing a graduate program. Another source of information on U.S. graduate schools is the Internet. There are sites, such as those listed at the back of this booklet, that allow you to search by field or specialty to find universities that offer programs and degrees that meet your interests. Visiting the universities’ Web sites allows you to find more detailed information on admission requirements, faculty research interests, and costs. Most institutions provide their catalogs online. International students at U.S. universities may also have Web sites with information about the university at which they are studying and life as an international student.

The most important factor should be how well the graduate program of an institution fits your particular interests, academic background, and goals. Although a university may offer a doctorate in your field, it may not have a program in the branch of that field that interests you. For example, some psychology departments specialize in clinical psychology and offer only a few courses in behavioral psychology, and others do not offer clinical psychology at all. Science and engineering departments will have groups of faculty and graduate students engaged in specific areas of research. You should consider how well your particular research interests fit within those areas. General guides, such as those listed in the back of this booklet, will tell you where programs are and university Web sites will tell you about the emphasis in various departments.

Many graduate program Web sites now have faculty sections and faculty member profiles. These Web pages describe faculty teaching and research interests and often list research publications. This information can be helpful in determining whether or not faculty specialties match your interests and experience.

An important point to determine is the nature of the program prerequisites. For the professional degree, work experience is often as important as academic prerequisites. For the research degree, however, there are almost always specific areas of subject matter and specific skills you must have mastered in prior studies. In the sciences and engineering, the prerequisites may be very specific.

Another important factor to determine is the selectivity of the program to which you want to apply: how many people apply to a given department or program, and how many are accepted? The greater the application pressure, the more likely it is that only the most highly qualified applicants will be accepted. This information may be available on a program statistics section of the Web site, or you may need to contact the graduate program director who has been designated to coordinate graduate admissions. This is the point at which to be very honest with yourself concerning your own academic background and intellectual potential.

You will probably have certain personal preferences regarding the kind of institution you want to attend. Size and location are two factors that often influence decisions about where to go to school. There are advantages to both large and small programs. A large one may offer a greater variety of sub-fields within a given discipline. In a small program you may get more personal attention. Location may also be important if you believe you would have trouble adjusting to a climate radically different from your own. You may prefer a small town or a large urban setting, or you may wish to be in

an area where there is a community of people originally from your country, or where there are a range of activities and resources of interest to you. International student services offices on many campuses typically post this information or will answer an inquiry.

All of the above suggestions are made to assist you in determining what program will be appropriate for you. Note that it is suggested that you do not rely on published rankings or reputational studies about U.S. institutions that attempt to define which institutions are “better” than others. Obviously, there is a tremendous range of quality among the 2,000 institutions that offer graduate programs in the U.S. In fact, there are so many differences among institutions and academic programs that the rankings are frequently misleading and too simplistic for applicants searching for an appropriate academic program.

Sources are available to help you learn the most about graduate study opportunities in the U.S. Several general guides to graduate programs are listed at the end of this booklet. Organizations in your country are also sources of information for you when considering admission to graduate study. They include binational centers and commissions, such as Fulbright commissions, U.S. Department of State Educational Advising/Information Centers, and the offices of the Institute of International Education (IIE) and American-Mideast Education and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST). Advising and counseling services are available at no charge in these offices. Your own academic institution’s library or career advising office may also have information and bulletins about U.S. colleges and universities.

Some students work with the assistance of private educational placement agents or agencies. Private agents usually charge a service fee that is paid by the client, who may be the applicant or the university. If you enlist the help of a private agent, you are advised to do some research to ensure that the person or agency is professional, reputable, and ethical. Be sure that you understand the terms of your agreement so that you know exactly what type of assistance they will provide. Agents can facilitate the process of identifying schools and programs that are the best fit for you. They can assist you in organizing your application materials and making the application. They can advise you in the visa application. However, they cannot guarantee your admission. The admission decision can only be made by the university or college based upon your academic record and preparation. If an agent promises you admission to a specific school or program or promises scholarships or other financial assistance, be wary. For graduate studies, most students are capable of making their own application for admission.

HOW TO APPLY TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

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This section provides a general overview of the application process. You should be careful to follow the specific instructions of each institution to which you apply. When applying for graduate study, you apply to a specific program or department, even though you may send your materials to a central graduate admissions office. Your application is evaluated by the program or department and by the institution. Some universities require two sets of application materials to be sent for separate consideration by the program or department and by the institution.

You should begin the application process *at least one year* in advance of the time when you wish to enroll. You will need to obtain information about programs and select the programs to which you wish to apply, complete the institutional applications forms, prepare all requested materials, take the required standardized tests, and allow the institution time to review your application and make a decision. Although many universities have adopted electronic systems for processing international student applications, this is not universal. Extra time should be allowed for international mail delivery and finally for obtaining the requisite passport and U.S. visa.

THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

In the United States, each educational institution has its own application materials and sets its own requirements for the credentials that every applicant must submit. Many U.S. universities have online or electronic application systems or processes. Check the institution's Web site to determine if you can apply online or download the application and then complete and mail it. You should check carefully all application materials you receive and be sure that you submit everything required by each institution to which you are applying. Each program may require different materials from you. Note the institution's application deadlines, and submit all required material well in advance of the deadlines; if paper

materials are required, allow for slow overseas mail delivery. If you have private financial resources or an external fellowship, you may be asked to indicate that on your application. If you are requesting financial aid from the U.S. institution, complete the appropriate form indicated by each institution to which you are applying. The following items are usually required.

APPLICATION FORM

Each institution to which you apply will have its own application form that asks for the essential information that the institution will use to file and keep track of your application. Read each application with care and complete all the questions accurately. Be consistent in how you give your name throughout the application process and on all communications with the university. The name provided on your application must be exactly the same as it appears on your passport. Some institutions may require a preliminary application, which requests information about your academic background, as well as financial and education resources. When you return the completed preliminary form, the institution will review it for eligibility for admission before sending you the formal application.

ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS

Official transcripts prepared by the institutions where you have studied, if available, must be submitted for all postsecondary education academic work completed or in progress and must give detailed information on the content and quality of your performance, including all courses taken each year, and grades received. The grading scale of the institution and your rank in class should be noted whenever possible. Degrees must be verified by the institutions granting the degrees with official copies of diplomas and statements of the type of degree conferred on the transcript.

All academic credentials must be originals bearing the seals of the institution and signatures of the registrar or copies verified by an academic official. Do not send documents that cannot be easily replaced. Copies certified by college official or notary publics are accepted in some cases.

All records must be sent in English or accompanied by an English translation. You should follow the instructions for submitting academic records provided by the institution to which you are applying. If the registrar of an institution does not issue records in English, an applicant might be asked to submit notarized or certified English translations. All

translations must be literal and complete versions of the original records. However, the names of degrees awarded should be given in the original language.

THE STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The statement of purpose is an extremely important part of the application because it gives the faculty assessing your application their most significant impression of you as an individual. What are your motivations? Do you write clearly? Do your interests really fit those of the department or institution? Can you communicate your ideas effectively? Are there special things about you that set you apart from other applicants and make you particularly desirable as a student? Again, be sure to follow the guidelines of the institutions to which you are applying.

You may need to write a different statement for each institution to which you apply. Before starting to write, read each institution's brochure or Web site and application carefully and understand the guidelines for your essay. State clearly your reasons for wanting to pursue graduate study, outline your areas of interest, and describe your past activities as they apply to your present and future interests. If you are applying to a Ph.D. program, be sure to include your research interests. You should explain how your academic experience and interests make you a good fit for the program to which you are applying. If you are applying to a professional program, describe any work internship or other experience connected with the field of professional study. Applicants in music and the arts may be required to audition or submit a portfolio of creative work. Take the time to write the essay carefully, and review it before submitting it.

RECOMMENDATION LETTERS

Most institutions require 3–5 letters from professors who know your work as a student or from employers who can evaluate your experience and interests. These letters should not be from relatives or personal friends. The writers should give objective and specific information about you. They should describe your academic skills in relation to those of other students taught and your personal strengths for undertaking advanced study. Some institutions provide a form that includes a checklist of specific attributes for their programs. Institutions may ask that these letters of reference be submitted via mail or electronically via an online recommendation system.

APPLICATION FEE

Most institutions require a nonrefundable application fee. Payment options may include check, money order, or credit card (e.g., Visa or Master Card). This fee should be submitted in U.S. dollars and is rarely waived for international applicants. It can be submitted on your behalf by relatives or friends in the United States, if obtaining U.S. funds is restricted in your home country. In such a case, be sure your name is indicated on the check or money order.

STANDARDIZED TESTS

You should review the admission requirements of the institutions to which you plan to apply and determine if you need to take one or several standardized tests, such as the GRE, the most widely used graduate admissions exam, or the GMAT, required by virtually all graduate management programs. In addition, most institutions require applicants who are not native English speakers to demonstrate proficiency in English through the use of standardized tests such as the TOEFL, the IELTS, or the TSE. Standardized tests provide a common measure for comparing the qualifications of applicants who come from a variety of institutions with different standards.

While international students are often apprehensive about taking these standardized tests, you should not delay taking them. Most graduate departments will not review an application unless it is complete, including test scores. The best preparation for the tests is a good academic background, plus, of course, a good command of English. Once you apply for taking a standardized test, the organization administering the test will make sample tests on its Web site available to you, which is very helpful for your preparation. If you are applying for autumn admissions of the subsequent year, you should plan to take these tests no later than October. It takes up to 15 business days for scores from computer-based tests to be reported to institutions and up to six weeks for the scores from paper-based tests to be reported to institutions.

There are no “passing” scores on standardized tests. Your scores, while an important part of your application, are only one of several selection criteria, and they will be reviewed together with all other parts of your application. Although tests can be retaken, retest scores rarely exhibit a dramatic increase over the first test scores; sometimes they are lower. An institution may evaluate your most recent scores, your highest scores, or may average your test scores, depending on its admissions policy.

GENERAL APTITUDE TESTS

If the GRE is required, it is important to note whether a specific subject test is required in addition to the general examination. The General Test does not examine a specific field of study; rather it measures verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills.

Your test scores are used to supplement your records of previous academic work and other qualifications for graduate study and to compare you with other applicants. The test is administered either as a computer-based or paper-based exam at testing centers. You can find more information about the test on the Web site of the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the organization producing and administering the test. The Web site is www.ets.org.

ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS

TOEFL, the most commonly used English proficiency examination, measures the ability of an applicant to understand and use the English language as written, spoken, and heard. It is concerned primarily with listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and other related factors. There are other English tests such as the IELTS and the MELAB (Michigan English Language Assessment Battery), which some graduate schools accept. Be sure you understand which test is accepted (or required) by the institutions to which you are applying. Web site addresses are listed at the back of this booklet.

TEST OF SPOKEN ENGLISH

The TSE is also produced and administered by the Educational Testing Service and measures a student's ability to communicate verbally. Some institutions require this test for those students who want to be considered for teaching assistantships. The TSE will be gradually phased out as more TOEFL-iBT testing sites are created around the world and make access to that test more broadly available to prospective international students.

HOW STUDENTS ARE ACCEPTED

Offers of admission to graduate programs are made upon the recommendation of admissions committees composed of professors in specific programs. These professors review and evaluate the applications submitted by students and decide which ones meet the program's (and the institution's) standards for admission. There are several factors that limit the number of students any program can accept. Among the most important are the number of professors and their specific interests, the amount of space available (particularly in laboratory fields), library resources, and, in research-oriented programs, the availability of money and equipment needed to carry out the research. Since most programs have more qualified applicants than they can possibly accept, admission is competitive and is offered only to those students judged to be best prepared and whose background and interests are well-suited to the program.

Your performance in previous academic work is a strong indicator of your ability to do graduate work, and admissions committees consider it carefully. They will try to determine how rigorous your education has been, particularly in those fields related to your proposed graduate study. They will also be interested in any work, research experience, or publications you have had that will indicate a particular aptitude for advanced study. For professional programs, admissions committees may be interested in work, internships, creative activities, or other experience you may have that is related to the program. Admissions committees are aware of the difficulties that can arise when students and programs are not well matched and will do all they can to ensure that offers of admission are made to students whose records indicate high potential for success in graduate work.

Some institutions through their Web sites allow you to check on the progress of your application. This can be a helpful tool in verifying that transcripts and letters of reference have been received.

FINANCING GRADUATE STUDY

Graduate study in the United States is expensive. You must be sure that you have access to adequate funds for yourself and any accompanying dependents for the period of study. You may be able to obtain support from your host institution, your government, foundations, or sponsoring fellowship programs to supplement your personal or family funds. You should be aware, however, that almost half (46 percent) of international graduate students in the U.S. support their study through personal or family funds, unlike in many other parts of the world where graduate education may be financed largely by the state or other sources.

U.S. universities provide major support to nearly half (47 percent) of international graduate students, mainly in the form of research or teaching assistantships, which are awarded on a competitive basis by the departments to which the students apply. Institutional policies related to providing support to international students vary widely—some institutions will not even review the application of an international student unless access to sufficient resources to cover the cost of study is indicated at the time of application. Others routinely offer support to many admitted students—most frequently those entering doctoral programs in the sciences.

Most institutions include an estimated budget for tuition, living costs, health insurance, and other items on the application and admissions section of their Web site. Naturally, the budget estimate will be higher for students with accompanying dependents. Compare this budget carefully with resources you have available. A student visa for study in the United States will not be issued until adequate support can be verified.

As a first step to seeking financial assistance, you should look into any type of aid available from your own government, fellowship foundations in your country, or your employer, and make appropriate and timely application for all such support. A limited number of fellowships (Fulbright Fellowships, etc.) for graduate study may be available through the U.S. embassy or Fulbright Commission in your country. You should

check directly with them or with the local educational advising office to see if you are eligible. If the institution to which you are applying accepts applications for financial support from international students, you should, of course, complete whatever application for institutional or financial support is indicated. You should also check to see if your institution has an exchange agreement with American institutions. These agreements reduce the costs of attending an American university.

There are three primary types of institutional support available for graduate study: fellowships, teaching assistantships, and research assistantships.

Fellowships are grants that are awarded on the basis of academic merit. In general, they provide payment of tuition and a living expense stipend. They are intended to support only the student's expenses—never those of dependents. International students may not be eligible for certain institutional fellowships.

Teaching assistantships are usually assigned by a particular program. The duties may involve leading a discussion section, supervising a laboratory, grading papers, and meeting with students to discuss the course. The typical appointment involves approximately 20 hours a week. If you are interested in obtaining a teaching assistantship, you should demonstrate excellent English proficiency. You should also keep in mind that this type of appointment, while providing good experience, also requires a substantial amount of your time and may increase the time required to complete your degree. Some institutions may require additional evaluation of language skill for new international teaching assistants. New teaching assistants may also be asked to take part in training workshops before the start of the academic year.

Research assistantships are available primarily in science and engineering fields and occasionally in the social science disciplines. If you receive such an appointment, usually you will be working in a laboratory assisting a professor on research projects. Advanced students working on their theses or dissertations are often supported as research assistants to do their own individual projects. Funding for research assistantships normally comes from a contract or grant obtained by a professor and may be available for only a limited amount of time.

Although institutional fellowships and teaching and research assistantships may be available for master's degree students, they are generally limited at that level. They are more likely to be reserved for doctoral students who require more time to complete their degree programs.

EMPLOYMENT

You should not count on employment as the means of covering your expenses while you are pursuing your degree. There are severe restrictions on employment permitted while in the U.S. on student or exchange visitor status. Working on campus is typically the only option available. You should also not count on income from an accompanying spouse who is also subject to severe employment restrictions.

VISAS

Entry requirements to study in the U.S. have changed since September 11, 2001. Below is an overview of the process, but you should check the Web site of the U.S. embassy or consulate in your country or the Web sites listed at the back of the booklet for more details and answers to your questions.

To secure a visa for study in the United States, you must first obtain a Certificate of Eligibility (I-20) or a DS-2019 (for individuals who are doing research but are not pursuing a degree) from the institution that has offered you admission or from the agency that is sponsoring your studies. These certificates cannot be issued to a student accepted for admission until documentation of adequate financial support is on file. The financial requirements are intended to ensure that you have sufficient funding in the U.S. and will not need to supplement your finances through unauthorized employment.

You must present the Certificate of Eligibility to a U.S. visa officer at the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to obtain a visa in your passport for entry into the U.S. In most countries, first-time student visa applicants are required to have an in-person interview at the embassy or consulate. You should consult the U.S. embassy Web site or call for specific instructions. Be aware that the busiest months are June, July, and August, and it may be difficult to schedule an interview in those months. The embassy or consulate cannot issue your visa until 120 days or less before your start date; however, you can apply in advance and, if approved, your visa will be issued at the appropriate time. You also cannot enter the U.S. earlier than 30 days before your start date, unless you have a visitor visa.

The two most common types of visas for students are:

- **Student Visa (F-1).** For a full-time course of study, obtained with an I-20 Certificate of Eligibility issued by the admitting institution. Accompanying dependents enter on an F-2 visa and may not be employed in the United States. You must enroll in the institution that issued the I-20 Certificate of Eligibility. This status allows for some part-time employment if employed on campus. Off-campus employment requires documentation of need.

- **Exchange-Visitor Visa (J-1).** Obtained with a DS-2019 Certificate of Eligibility issued by the institution or sponsoring agency. This visa is required for students sponsored by certain agencies, foundations, governments, or for reciprocal exchange students. Students with other sources of funding may obtain the DS-2019 on request. In some cases, Exchange-Visitors must leave the United States at the conclusion of their programs, may not change immigration status, and may not apply for work visas or permanent residency in the United States until they have returned to their home countries for at least 2 years. This status allows for some employment if authorized by the sponsoring agency or institution. The spouse of an Exchange-Visitor enters on a J-2 visa and may, in some cases, obtain permission to work.

All students must maintain a visa status that allows for registration as a student. It is extremely difficult—sometimes impossible—to change immigration categories after arrival in the United States. If you obtain a Tourist Visa (B-2) from the U.S. Consul, it will be difficult to change to an F-1 or J-1 student status after your arrival in the United States unless the words “Prospective Student” are noted on your B-2 visa stamp in your passport.

Upon receipt of the I-20 or DS-2019 form, you must complete the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) form I-901 and pay a required fee in U.S. currency. You may complete and submit an electronic version of this form online or a paper version through the mail. You may make your interview appointment before you pay the fee, but you must have a payment receipt at the time of your interview.

There are a number of documents you must provide when you apply for a visa. In addition to the I-20 (or DS-2019), you will need a completed Form DS-156 and Form DS-158, a valid passport, a 2 × 2-inch photograph and receipts for the Machine Readable Visa (MRV) and the SEVIS I-901. You should be prepared to provide the letter of admission, transcripts and diplomas from the institutions you have attended, scores from the required standardized tests (TOEFL, GRE, etc.), and evidence you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses for the period of study. During the interview, you can expect a two-digit, ink-free fingerprint scan. An interview is typically short (lasting no more than two to three minutes) and conducted in English. The consular officer will expect you to be honest, communicate clearly in English, provide short and direct answers to questions, and provide all of the required documents.

If you are denied a visa, request the reason in writing. You may apply again; depending on the consulate to which you apply, you may have an

unlimited number of attempts or you may be restricted to a certain number of attempts during a time frame. [For more information on the application process, go to: <http://educationusa.state.gov/usvisa.htm>.]

If you are approved, you will receive a visa stamp in your passport. At the port of entry to the United States, you will receive a Form I-94, which documents your authorized stay. You should keep this form with your passport. When you enter the U.S., you must also have Form I-20 (or DS-2019) in your possession. On your first entry, you will be enrolled in the US-VISIT entry-exit program by having a two-digit fingerprint scan completed to authenticate your travel documents.

If you have questions about your status upon receipt of your Certificate of Eligibility, you should contact the institution. The U.S. Educational Advising/Information Center student advisor or the U.S. consular office can assist you with your questions about the process. Be sure you understand the limitations of the status before you leave your country. The rights and restrictions of each status are written on the Certificate of Eligibility document.

LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

HOUSING

A variety of housing accommodations are available to graduate students in the United States. Many universities provide at least some housing on campus and may give international students preference for it. You should, however, expect to make your own arrangements for housing, whether on or off campus.

On-campus housing can range from a dormitory room, which may or may not be shared with another student, to a small apartment, to a reasonably sized three-bedroom apartment for a family. The monthly rent for on-campus accommodations may be less than the rents off campus.

Many graduate students live off campus, either by themselves or with a small group in a house or apartment. Most universities have offices that list available rooms, apartments, and houses, provide maps of the local area, and give advice on reasonable rents and lease arrangements. Rents throughout the United States vary greatly depending on whether the university is located in a rural, suburban, or urban environment, the demand from others who are competing for the same housing, and the region of the country.

HEALTH INSURANCE

The United States does not have a national health plan. The potential cost of health care to you if you are not insured is extraordinarily high. Some sponsoring organizations provide health insurance, and universities also offer various insurance plans. It is very important for you to review these plans. Most universities require health insurance. If you have accompanying dependents, you must have an insurance plan that adequately insures your dependents as well as yourself. Health insurance is expensive, but it is absolutely necessary to budget this cost as an expense for study in the United States.

TRANSPORTATION

Some parts of the United States have relatively little public transportation available, compared to many other countries. At many institutions, bicycles are a popular method of transportation, especially during pleasant weather. If you decide to live off campus, you should check with the university to determine whether a car is desirable or necessary. Student budgets rarely include the cost of purchasing a car. If you believe you will want or need a car, add its purchase, insurance, and operating costs to your budget.

APPLICATION CHECKLIST

Institutions and degree programs may require some or all of the following, as well as other supplemental materials not listed here:

- Application for admission (electronic or paper)
- Academic credentials (transcripts, etc.)
- Statement of purpose (and other required essays)
- Letters of recommendation
- Standardized test results
- Application for financial aid
- Application for fellowships
- Application fee
- Any other requested information

SOME FINAL ADVICE

This booklet provides information that is intended to introduce you to the American system of graduate education. For more detailed information on programs and requirements, you must contact individual institutions. In addition, once you arrive at the institution in which you will study, there will be an international student office to help you. Most international officers, graduate offices, and graduate programs have orientation programs. Take advantage of any and all, since they will cover different information. You should not hesitate to ask for advice and help from these offices, from your faculty advisor, and from other students. In the U.S., students are expected to speak up both in class and elsewhere, to let others know if they need assistance or information, and to persevere until they get what they need.

GOOD LUCK!

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT GRADUATE PROGRAMS, FUNDING, AND STUDYING IN THE UNITED STATES

Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S. (Princeton, NJ: Peterson's)
www.petersons.com

Peterson's (directories of schools, test study guides) www.petersons.com

Funding for United States Study 2007–2008: A Guide for International Students and Professionals; Funding for United States Study: A Scholarship Guide for Europeans; and Funding for United States Study: Graduate and Postgraduate Opportunities for Latin Americans (Institute of International Education. IIEBooks Fulfillment Center, P.O. Box 1020, Sewickley, PA 15143-1020, USA, or www.iiebooks.org)

GradSchools.com (directories of schools)
www.gradschools.com

EduPASS
www.edupass.org

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ABOUT STANDARDIZED TESTS

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

www.ets.org/toefl/

Test of Spoken English (TSE)

www.ets.org/tse

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

www.ielts.org

Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)

www.ets.org/gre/

Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)

www.mba.com

Miller Analogies Test (MAT)

harcourtassessment.com/haiweb/Cultures/en-US/dotCom/milleranalogies/about/The+Miller+Analogies+Test.htm

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON VISAS AND SEVIS

US EMBASSY AND CONSULATES

usembassy.state.gov/

US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Visas (General)

travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html

Educational Advising/Information Centers

educationUSA.state.gov/

Visa Denials

travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/denials/denials_1361.html

F-1 Student Visas

travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html

J-1 Exchange Visitor Visas

travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1267.html

SEVIS

www.fmjfee.com/index.jhtml



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