

How to have

an://internationally.friendly

Website

The Educational Information and Resources Branch within the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs provides professional development and educational resources for advisers at the nearly 500 **EducationUSA** centers around the world and strives to strengthen links between centers and U.S. higher education institutions. Following are suggestions from advisers on how U.S. institutions can make their websites more accessible to prospective international students.

DO provide	DON'T
Link for international students on your home page & refer applicants to the EducationUSA center in their country: http://www.educationusa.state.gov/	Require Social Security Numbers Most international students don't have them.
Regional accrediting association details. Accreditation is a key element in the selection process.	Require GPAs Many countries do not offer GPAs.
Tuition and cost information – List total amount that will appear on I-20 as well as individual programs costs.	Require zip codes or a U.S. address.
Names of months/specific dates for completion of required testing, application deadlines, notification, orientation and enrollment.	Use terms “Fall” and “Spring” – These are confusing to students from the southern hemisphere or areas with no seasons.
Contact information for all offices dealing with international students.	Give 800 numbers. They are not toll free outside the U.S. Also, automated responses are often not received overseas.
Deadlines – prominently listed with clear mailing instructions	Use “college” to refer to university-level programs.
FAQs about your institution/foreign student admissions and services.	Require original copies of academic certificates. Many international students cannot obtain multiple originals of their academic certificates. Define what you mean by certified, and provide a PDF example. Provide instructions for submitting a signed copy provided by the home university. Refer students to an EducationUSA center for assistance: http://www.educationusa.state.gov/centers
Checklist for required documents and tests.	
Local Information (campus size in hectares, average local temperatures in Celsius, distances in kilometers, etc.)	
Number of credit/hours needed to be enrolled full-time.	
Course catalog with course description.	
Downloadable application in a variety of formats.	
Application fee waivers or allow students without credit cards to mail application fee after completing on-line applications.	
Information on programs open to international candidates and which are not.	

PLEASE CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

- Admission process:**
 - Give some philosophical background and say why it is not based simply on grades and scores. General requirements don't help.
 - Sites should specify clearly who qualifies and give provide profiles of admissible students.
 - Provide separate links for undergraduate and graduate admission.
 - Include links to department requirements for graduate students.
- Applications:**
 - Be clear about what you do not want: no folders, no plastic sleeves, no copies of awards or extracurricular accomplishments, no SAT-II in native language, etc.
 - Online applications should have provisions for the lengthy names and mailing addresses that international students often have.
- Application Process:** Consider assigning prospective students a student mentor or guide- preferably a current student from the same country- whom they could consult before and during the application process.
- Common Application:** Schools that accept this should give a description, describe the advantages, and provide a link.
- Counselor's Report:** Many students do not have counselors. Please list an acceptable alternative, i.e. school principal.
- Deferred Enrollment:** Give information about deferred enrollment, especially for students serving compulsory national service. State whether scholarships may be deferred. Specify whether students who plan to defer enrollment may apply Early Decision.
- Early Decision/Early Action:** Please explain the difference. State whether an international student who is also applying for financial aid may apply under Early Decision.
- ESL:** If this is available, please include information on the home page. It is hard for students to find ESL course information if it is buried inside pages for Extension Courses.
- Extension Courses:** Please state which ones can provide an I-20. A good example is: <http://www.uclaextension.edu/>.
- Faculty:** Have web pages for faculty, their profiles and areas of research interests.
- Financial Aid:**
 - State what financial aid, scholarships, and work opportunities are available to foreign students and how much a student can expect to earn.
 - State whether a social security number is required before an assistantship can be awarded.
 - Mention whether stipends are taxable income.
- Glossary:** Please include for ease in navigating sites.
- Housing/Meals:** Please describe what is available and how meal plans work. What are the options during vacations if student is unable to return home?
- I-20:** Describe what this is and how it is issued.
- International Student Office:** Please describe the function and what services are available.
- Mandatory Subjects:** Many foreign students experience frustration when university websites include a list of mandatory subjects that high school students must have studied. For instance: 4 years of English, 3 years of Math, 3 years of Social Science, etc. Students coming from different educational systems often do not meet these requirements since many foreign systems do not fit into a U.S. model. Attempting to chart foreign education systems using an online application can seem nearly impossible and completely frustrating to many prospective foreign students.

- ❑ **Practical Training:** List organizations that recruit students from the campus for practical training. Mention numbers of job offers per student
- ❑ **References:** When requesting references, clarify “disclosed” and “undisclosed” - this wording confuses many students.
- ❑ **SAT and TOEFL:** Please include school codes. State if applicant can submit scores even if not required.
- ❑ **Statistics:** How many international students applied, and how many were accepted?
- ❑ **Score Cut-offs/Averages:** If scores are just one part of the application, specify what parts of the application are given more weight.
- ❑ **Sports Scholarships:** Please state if these are available, the application processes and tips for working with the NCAA clearinghouse.
- ❑ **Tests:** Please include the last test date when a student may register and take a test and still be able to submit an application that meets the deadline.
- ❑ **TOEFL Requirements:** Clarify what your institution is looking for. Address the needs of bilingual students, non-native speakers of English with 700 SAT verbal scores, non-native speakers who have been in English-language instruction for the past four years etc. State if students may submit ELPT or IELTS test results instead of TOEFL scores.
- ❑ **TOEFL Institutional Codes:** Listing these will help students make sure schools receive scores.
- ❑ **Transfer Information:** Provide information on eligibility for transfer admission of international students. Include financial aid policies for transfer students.
- ❑ **U.S. Education System:** Explain the terms elementary, middle and high school through grades, i.e. grades 1-4, 5-8 and 9-12.
- ❑ **Unfamiliar Terms:** Explain terms that may be unfamiliar to applicants from abroad, such as:
 - Room & board
 - Middle name (for most Middle Eastern students; this is the father’s name and not the US definition of middle name)
 - Ethnicity
 - GPA – how is this calculated
- ❑ **Website Maintenance:** Let students know if your site is down on weekends - often students are frantic on a Sunday because they can not get the website to respond Friday night, Saturday or Sunday.
 - **Keep your links up-to date!** Students rely on the web to gather information and to meet deadlines. There is nothing more frustrating than finding the graduate application for Petroleum Engineering only to have the link dead end.
- ❑ **Work Week in the U.S.:** Provide information on the work week and include office hours and time zones. Explain what business days are. If possible, include a conversion link on the site (<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>)...or a clock showing the time and date on the campus at that moment.
- ❑ **16th year:** Mention the 16th year requirement for 3-year bachelor degree holders from overseas. Include:
 - What credentials are acceptable? Is a completed master’s program required? Are those who complete only a first year of a master’s program ineligible?
 - Whether postgraduate diplomas are acceptable or not.
 - Whether degrees obtained through distance learning are acceptable.
 - Countries where this 16th year rule applies.
 - Emphasize that this is for applicants to graduate programs.



IMPORTANT LINKS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS:

- If there is no direct link to “international students” on your home page, many students will click the link for “prospective students.” From there, sites should link to:
 - School description with costs and housing information
 - *International* undergraduate/graduate admission
 - Proportion of international students at the university and class profiles
 - Quotes and profiles of accepted international students
 - Requirements and documents that apply to international students
 - Visas: *Up-to-date* information with new SEVIS regulations is located at:
 - <http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>
 - <http://travel.state.gov/>
 - http://travel.state.gov/visa/frvi/forms/forms_1342.html - is the place to download visa application forms
- **EducationUSA Centers:** Link to <http://educationusa.state.gov> and encourage students to contact the Department of State-affiliated EducationUSA advising center in their country.
- **Examples** of good internationally-friendly websites:
 - State University of New York at Buffalo - www.buffalo.edu
 - <http://www.buffalo.edu/aboutmyub/>, <http://www.ee.buffalo.edu/>
 - Information on degrees and research opportunities are all on one page.
 - http://www.ee.buffalo.edu/grad_admission.htm
Clearly states admissions requirements, provides institutional/ departmental codes for score reporting, lists deadlines, provides guidelines on letters of recommendation (content, focus), gives guidelines on payment of application fee, provides mailing address, and states how to receive a form I-20.
 - University of California at Irvine - www.uci.edu
 - Departmental websites give detailed information on topics of specialization along with details of faculty members’ research interests.
 - Worcester Polytechnic Institute - www.wpi.edu
 - The undergraduate admissions page has a chat facility for prospective international students to chat with enrolled students <http://www.wpi.edu/cgi-bin/ubb/ultimatebb.cgi?ubb=forum&f=5>
 - University of Massachusetts at Lowell www.uml.edu
 - Has good International Student Handbook <http://www.uml.edu/grad/Inter/forms/handbook2004-05.pdf>
 - Georgia Institute of Technology www.gatech.edu
<http://www.ece.gatech.edu/academics/graduate/apply.html>
This departmental website walks the applicants through the online application process and outlines the weight that is assigned to each component of the application package.

**...and finally
update your site regularly and
present a welcoming appearance!**

