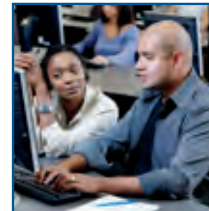




If You Want to Study in the United States

If You Want to Study in the United States: Short-Term Study



SHORT-TERM STUDY, ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS,
DISTANCE EDUCATION, AND ACCREDITATION

3

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Cover Design: Rolando Ribera

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Booklet 3

Short-Term Study, English Language Programs,
Distance Education, and Accreditation

Acknowledgments

This four-booklet series, published under the title *If You Want to Study in the United States*, was produced by the U.S. Department of State's Educational Information and Resources Branch. The booklets are also available on the Internet at <http://www.educationusa.state.gov>. This current edition is an updated version of the original project coordinated by Evelyn Levinson in 2000-2001. The update project was administered by the College Board Office of International Education through a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State. Carol Blythe and Janine Farhat thank Coleen Gatehouse for her organization and editing and Rolando Ribera for his cover design.

The Department of State wishes to thank the following individuals from around the world who contributed their time, expertise, and talents to this series:

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Preface



Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation is one of a series of four introductory booklets produced by the U.S. Department of State to provide objective and practical advice to prospective international students and scholars on studying in the United States. The booklets may be downloaded from the Internet at www.educationusa.state.gov, and print copies are available at EducationUSA advising centers worldwide. To find the center nearest you, contact a U.S. embassy or consulate, or consult the list available on the EducationUSA website. The four booklets cover the following areas:

Undergraduate Study

How to choose and apply to U.S. bachelor's and associate degree programs, plus information on technical and vocational educational opportunities in the United States.

Graduate and Professional Study and Research

How to research and apply to U.S. master's, doctoral degree, and postdoctoral programs, plus information on certification and licensing procedures for professionals who wish to further their education or practice in the United States.

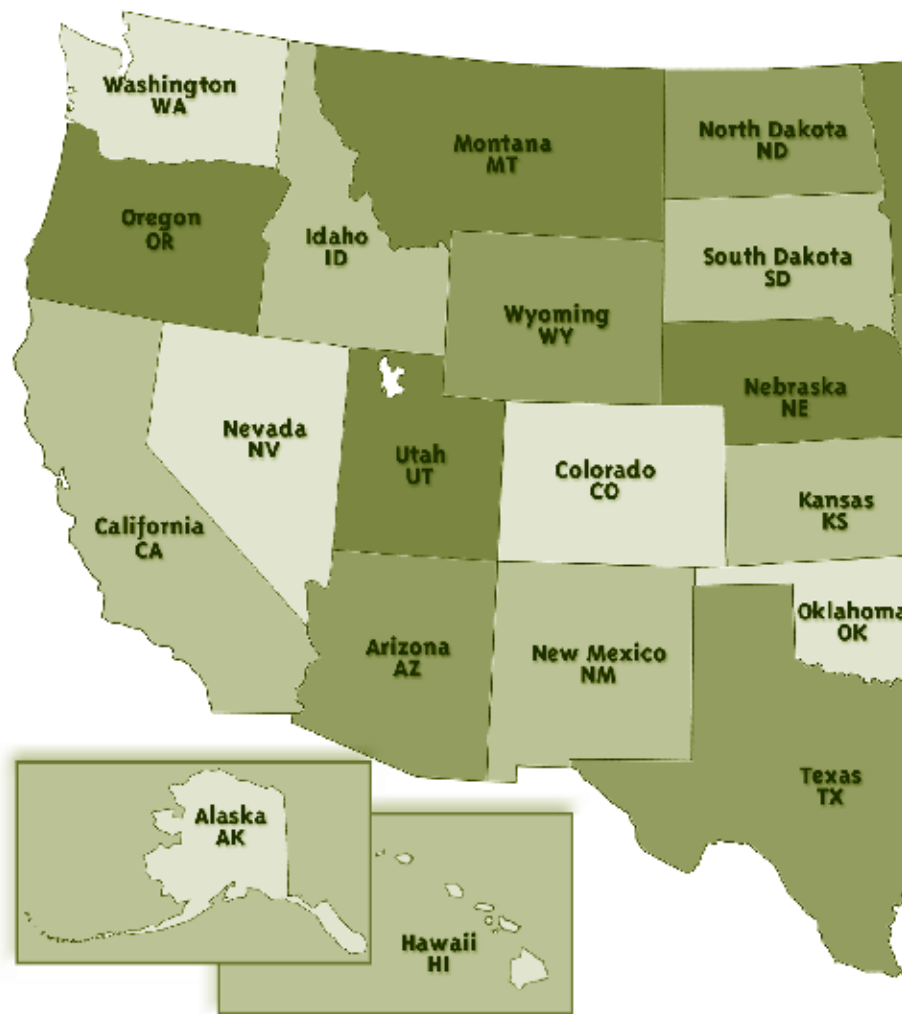
Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation

Information on opportunities to study in the United States for up to one year, plus an overview of studying toward a degree, diploma, or certificate from outside the United States through distance education programs. The booklet also includes detailed information on accreditation of U.S. higher education institutions.

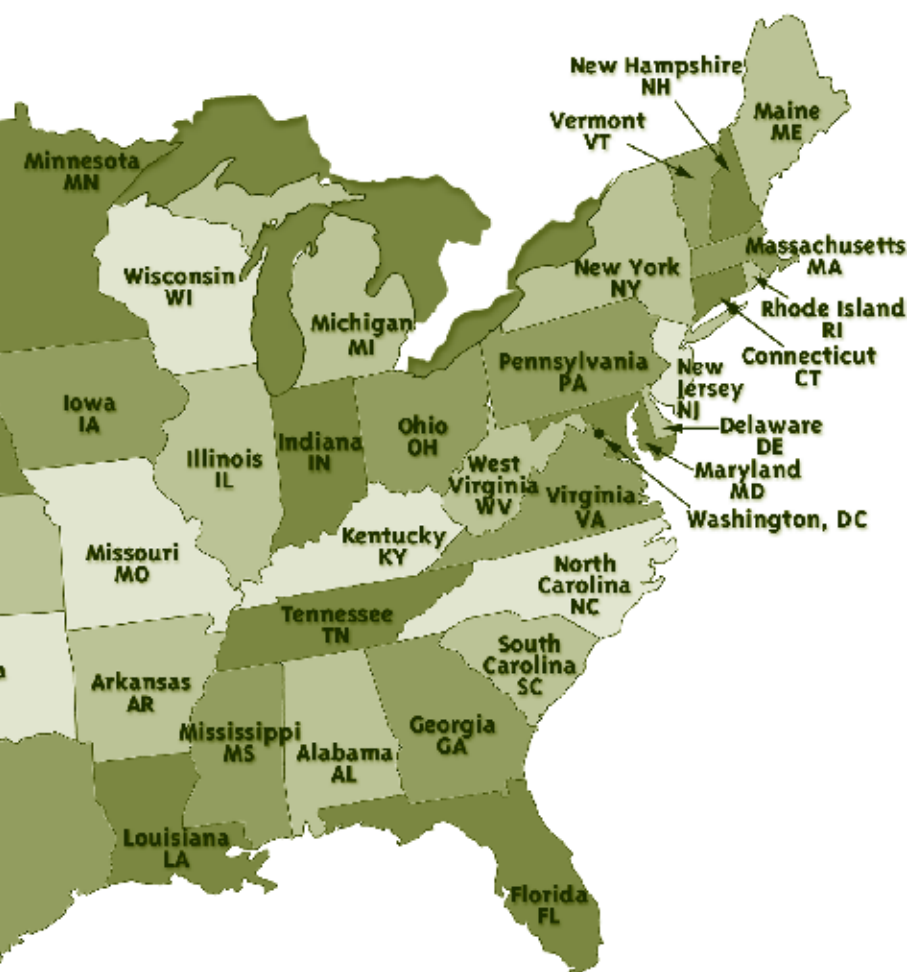
Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States

Help with planning your move to the United States after you have been accepted to a U.S. university or college. This booklet provides advice on applying for a visa, moving to the United States, and what to expect when you arrive on campus.

The United States



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Introduction

U.S. institutions offer a variety of alternative opportunities to pursue your academic and professional goals in the United States. These include short-term exchanges, English language programs, distance education courses and degrees, and specialized professional education.

Why Study in the United States?

Here are just a few of the reasons why more than 600,000 international students from around the world are furthering their education in the United States:

Quality: U.S. higher education institutions are known worldwide for the quality of their facilities, resources, and teachers. Accreditation systems ensure that institutions continue to maintain these standards. High school exchange sponsors throughout the United States must also adhere to standards for quality set by the government.

Choice: The U.S. education system is unrivaled in the choice it offers in types of institutions, academic and social environments, entry requirements, degree programs, and subjects in which to specialize.

Diversity: You can find a mix of people from all different backgrounds and all corners of the globe on U.S. campuses; more than 600,000 international students come to study in the United States each year.

Value: As an investment in your future, a U.S. degree offers excellent value for the money. A wide range of tuition fees and living costs, plus some financial help from universities, make study in the United States affordable for thousands of students.

Flexibility: Students in the United States may choose from many courses within their university and have the option to move from one institution to another.

EducationUSA Advising Centers

“It is difficult to overestimate the help and support I got from the advising center. The center was my first and primary source of information about the American educational system. The books, magazines, and the Internet access at the center proved extremely useful, and the staff assisted me very much in achieving my goals.”

— Business student from Russia

Choosing the best program for you will require commitment and careful planning on your part, but nearly 450 EducationUSA advising centers worldwide are ready to help you with information and advice. These centers have directories, program guides, and admissions test information, as well as trained educational advisers who want to help you and your family with the process of choosing and applying to programs. Some centers run events like college fairs or seminars. Introductory information in the form of video or group presentations, website access, and independent resource libraries is available free of charge, but payment may be required at some centers for additional services.

All EducationUSA advising centers are supported by the U.S. Department of State, with the goal of providing objective information on the range of study opportunities available in the United States; however, the names of the centers and the organizations that run them vary from country to country. To locate the center nearest you, contact your closest U.S. embassy or consulate, or consult the list available on the EducationUSA website (<http://www.educationusa.state.gov>).

Good luck!

Useful Websites

EducationUSA

<http://www.educationusa.state.gov>

If You Want to Study in the United States (online version)

<http://www.educationusa.state.gov>

(Click on the “If You Want to Study” link.)

Directory of EducationUSA Advising Centers

<http://www.educationusa.state.gov>

(Click on the “Find an Advising Center” link.)



Short-Term Study in the United States

“Don’t try to choose based only on one aspect or criterion; look at the program as a whole.”

— Business student from Sri Lanka

The United States offers a wide range of study programs lasting 12 months or less, including high school exchange programs, work and professional exchange programs, vocational and techni-

cal programs, short-term university study, and professional study. This chapter gives an overview of some things you need to think about when applying to short-term study programs in the United States.

Choosing a Program

Doing your “homework” is the best way to succeed in any edu-

cational program. Your relatively short time of study in the United States will be enhanced by careful planning and advance preparation. Define your goals and begin researching programs 12 to 18 months prior to the date you wish to begin a program.

Begin your search by consulting the reference materials at your nearest EducationUSA advising center. You can also find information on the Internet. See “Useful Websites” at the end of this chapter and “Additional Resources” at the end of the book for more information.

Identify several programs that meet your personal and professional requirements. Then contact the organizations or institutions that run the programs and request detailed information, being sure to let them know your specific needs.

Factors to Consider

Compare the programs that interest you by considering:

- application deadlines;
- eligibility and admission requirements;
- accreditation of the programs or institutions;

- costs;
- availability of and/or assistance finding housing;
- local environment (including geographic location, climate, and access to public transportation); and
- other benefits (such as orientation programs and social activities).

You should also consider the history of the program: How long has the program existed, who are the typical participants, and, if applicable, what careers or jobs have past participants found after completing the program? If it is not an international exchange program, how experienced are the program administrators in dealing with participants from outside the United States?

If you are considering short-term study at a college or university, you may wish to consult Booklets One and Two in this series, which contain more information on factors to consider when choosing a U.S. college or university.

Accreditation

An important indicator of the quality of any U.S. university or program is its accreditation sta-

tus. Unlike many other countries, the United States does not have a central government office that approves educational institutions. Instead, it relies on a system of voluntary accreditation carried out by non-governmental accrediting bodies to ensure that schools meet standards.

Check carefully whether a program you are applying to will be recognized by your home country government and any relevant professional associations, ministries, or employers. Talk to participants who have returned to your country to see if they have been successful in applying their U.S. experiences and credentials to their chosen professions back home.

For more detailed information, please see chapter 4, “Accreditation.”

Costs

The cost of short-term study in the United States varies considerably. Costs are determined by the institution’s tuition charges and other fees, as well as by the program type and length and by the materials you will be required to purchase to complete the program. Information about the costs of each program is available in program brochures, catalogs, application materials, and

websites. Remember to include the cost of traveling to and from the United States, living expenses such as room and board, and health insurance as you prepare your budget.

Funding

Funding from universities, scholarship organizations, or grant-giving bodies is difficult to obtain for short-term study in the United States. Much of this type of funding is given to degree-seeking students or to researchers.

High School Exchanges

In the United States, “high school” is the term used to denote the three or four years of education that precede college or university study. High school is equivalent to secondary school in many countries.

Each year approximately 30,000 students from around the world travel to the United States for high school exchanges. The vast majority of these students come for a full academic year, living with a volunteer American host family and attending an American high school. Others come for a single semester. Students enter the United States for these programs on a J-1 (exchange visitor) visa.

Students may also travel to the United States for shorter exchange programs ranging from a few weeks to a few months. These exchanges do not include attendance at a U.S. high school, but often include home stays and cultural activities.

Participants in these exchanges are generally self-funded, and scholarships are rare. Contact local exchange organizations for more information about funding available to students from your country.

Government Supported Exchanges

The U.S. government funds some high school exchanges: the Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX), for students in the republics of the former Soviet Union; the Youth Exchange and Study Program (YES), for students from countries with significant Muslim populations; the American Serbia and Montenegro Youth Leadership Exchange (A-SMYLE), for students from Serbia and Montenegro; and the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program, for students from the United States and Germany. Admission to these programs is competitive. Check the website of the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate or contact your

EducationUSA advising center to determine if one of these programs is available in your country.

Other Exchanges

Many private organizations offer programs as well. These U.S. sponsors, which all have local chapters or partners in other countries, screen and select students, provide the documents needed to apply for a student visa, identify appropriate home and school placements in the United States, and support students after their arrival. Sponsor organizations charge a fee for their services.

Picking an appropriate sponsor is an important decision. Compare several sponsors in terms of the services they offer, including the support they provide students while in the United States, as well as their price. Ask for recommendations from students who have already completed individual programs to learn about their experiences. Do not base your decision solely on price. A high school exchange program is a major event in a student's life, and it is important to find a high quality program.

Sponsors that have been approved to issue the appropriate visa documentation for high school ex-

changes are listed on the State Department website at <http://eca.state.gov/jexchanges/index.cfm>. In addition, the Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), which sets standards for organizations offering high school exchanges, provides a list of programs on its website (<http://www.csiet.org>).

Direct Enrollment

Another exchange option is to arrange for your own attendance at a U.S. high school. If you would like to do this, a good starting point is to contact the department of education for the state where you wish to study and request information on schools within that state or in a particular section of the state.

Unless you plan to live with relatives or participate in an organized program, you will be responsible for arranging your own accommodations in the United States. Under current visa regulations, if you make your own arrangements to attend a U.S. high school, you must enter the United States on an F-1 visa, not a tourist visa. To get the visa, you will need documentation from the U.S. school stating that it has accepted you as a student. If you will attend a public high school, you must show proof that you have paid

for your educational expenses before an F-1 visa will be issued. The maximum length of time you can attend a U.S. public high school is one year. If you attend a private high school there is no prepayment requirement or time limitation.

Exchange Programs Providing Professional Experience

Short-term professional exchanges in the United States vary widely in nature; some allow participants to accept a wide range of work, while others restrict them to experiences related to their chosen career, or even to a specific job, such as being an au pair. Each program has different eligibility requirements. Since the participants in this type of exchange must travel to the United States on a J-1 visa, these programs are often known as J-1 professional exchange programs.

J-1 professional exchange programs include:

Summer Work/Travel: permits postsecondary students to work in the U.S. during their summer vacations. Most jobs are casual in nature, including working in resort areas or at U.S. national parks. Maximum program duration is four months.

Camp Counselor: allows foreign nationals to work at U.S. summer camps for up to four months.

Intern: allows matriculated university students and recent graduates to pursue an internship with a U.S. business or non-profit organization for periods of up to 12 months. This program is designed to offer participants training to develop their skills and to expose them to American professional practices.

Trainee: allows eligible foreign participants the opportunity to develop professional skills with a U.S. business or organization. Participants are generally a bit older than interns and already have some professional experience. Programs in this category may be as long as 18 months.

Teacher: allows qualified, experienced teachers to teach full time in U.S. primary or secondary accredited schools for up to three years.

Au Pair: allows foreign participants ages 18-26 to live with an American family and provide up to 45 hours per week of childcare in the home. The program also includes a mandatory educational component conducted outside the home.

Sponsor Organizations

All participants in J-1 exchange programs must come to the United States through a designated sponsoring organization. Sponsors that have been approved to issue the appropriate visa documentation (Certificate of Eligibility: Form DS-2019) are listed on the State Department website at <http://eca.state.gov/jexchanges/index.cfm>. In addition to issuing the DS-2019 form required to apply for a visa, sponsors assist with placements and provide support to participants. Further information on the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program is available on the Department of State's website at <http://exchanges.state.gov/jexchanges/>.

You may also wish to consult the website of the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange (www.alliance-exchange.org), an association of sponsors, which includes links to more than 70 member organizations.

Plan your participation in a professional exchange program as far in advance as possible. Most exchange programs require you to find a specific work placement in the United States before you apply to the sponsor organization/exchange program. Programs may

have application deadlines, or they may require that you apply a certain number of weeks or months before you intend to leave for the United States. Ask the individual sponsor organization how long the whole process will take. Allow time to apply for and obtain your visa. If possible, do not purchase a plane ticket before you are informed that your visa application has been successful.

The information above serves only as a brief introduction to programs that provide professional experience. Contact an EducationUSA advising center for more information and to find out which programs are available in your country.

Vocational and Technical Programs

If you are interested in learning a new skill or updating an existing one, consider a short-term program offered at a two-year community or junior college, a vocational or technical institution, or a private training center.

Ranging in length from several days to more than a year, these programs are designed to meet specific, practical training requirements to prepare students for immediate employment. Hands-on learning activities are

a major component of vocational and technical education. Common fields of study include data processing, computer programming, construction, automotive mechanics, drafting, and secretarial services.

Technical education requires students to learn concepts, theory, and design in addition to practical skills. These programs are found not only at community and junior colleges, but also at some four-year colleges and universities. See Booklet One in this series, *Undergraduate Study*, for more information about community colleges and universities.

Technical and vocational programs lead to certificates of completion or diplomas, not to university degrees. Before you apply to a technical or vocational training program, check to make sure that your training program and any certificate or diploma you might earn will be recognized upon return to your home country and that the institution you are considering holds the appropriate type of U.S. accreditation. Accreditation of technical and vocational schools is carried out by national bodies, such as the Career College Association, or by the relevant divisions of institutional accrediting bodies. Specialized accrediting

bodies also exist for some vocational fields such as allied health areas. See chapter 4 in this booklet for information on the significance of accreditation and a detailed explanation of institutional accrediting bodies and specialized accreditation.

Short-Term University Study

Would you like to study at a U.S. university, but cannot commit to studying for a full degree in the United States? University exchange programs, non-degree or “special student” study, and summer study offer the opportunity to spend a summer, a semester, or an academic year at a university in the United States without enrolling in a degree program. With careful planning this study could be part of your degree program in your home country. You could also take just a few courses at a U.S. university — at the undergraduate or graduate level — for personal or professional enrichment.

University Exchange Programs

Many U.S. universities have formal links with universities outside the United States and offer student exchange programs with these partners. Under such programs, U.S. students and students from another country trade plac-

es and experience living in each other’s countries and studying at each other’s universities. Most of these programs last either a semester or an academic year. The advantage of this arrangement is that students from outside the United States generally pay the amount of tuition charged by their home university rather than the tuition and fees of the U.S. university, which can be considerably higher.

Contact the office responsible for international programs and linkages at your institution to ask if your school has exchange agreements with any U.S. universities. If it does, find out how the exchange program operates and whether you are eligible to take part. If you are applying to study at universities and colleges in your home country and know you would like to spend some time studying in the United States, find out whether they operate any U.S. exchange programs.

Funding from U.S. institutions for short-term study is very limited. If you are not eligible to receive funding from your own school or from the U.S. institution, you might try to obtain funding from social, welfare, or community organizations, from multinational companies, or from local businesses.

Non-Degree or “Special Student” Study

Many U.S. universities allow students to take degree-level courses without enrolling in a full degree program. Under this arrangement, you might be able to take classes in a specific department, in several departments throughout a university, or possibly at several universities in a local area. Be sure to ask the institution to which you are applying, as well as the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, about visa requirements for your particular situation.

Non-degree students who take degree-level classes may be called special students. Many universities impose a time limit on the number of semesters for which you can be registered as a non-degree or special student. For detailed information on how to choose and apply to U.S. universities, see Booklets One and Two in this series, *Undergraduate Study* and *Graduate and Professional Study and Research*.

General information on the opportunities and requirements for special student study should be available in most universities’ online catalogs. For specific information and application procedures for schools and programs that interest you, contact university

admissions offices. For postgraduate study, contact the individual departments concerned, explaining that you wish to do short-term study as a special student.

Special students are usually, though not always, ineligible to receive university-sponsored financial assistance such as scholarships or assistantships. Funding may be available from independent foundations and organizations, such as Fulbright Commissions, that award scholarships for postgraduate study. Further information is available at the nearest EducationUSA advising center, your local university’s study abroad office or career placement center, and perhaps at the local public library.

Summer Study

Some universities in the United States offer classes during the summer break between May and August. They may offer one or two “summer sessions,” and each session usually lasts between six and ten weeks. Be sure to ask the institution to which you are applying, as well as the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate, about visa requirements for your particular program. The visa application process can be as long as several months, so be sure to plan ahead.

Many universities open summer session classes to the public, and they sometimes make on-campus dormitory accommodations available. Students who are enrolled in a degree program at the university may also take classes during the summer to finish their degree faster or to catch up on classes they missed or in which they want to improve their grades.

Some summer programs will not accept students under 18 years of age or those who have not finished secondary school. However, a few universities may allow students who are in the final years of their high school studies to attend. Deadlines for enrolling are often one to two months in advance of the start date of the class. Check the school's summer session brochure or website for eligibility requirements and application procedures.

Another way to study in the United States during the summer months is to attend a summer school or institute. Summer schools and institutes offer a range of courses aimed at personal enrichment and professional development rather than the attainment of a degree. They are available at some English language centers (see chapter 2 in this booklet), as well as at institutes offering classes in cooking,

fashion, music, the arts, and other topics.

Visiting Fellows and Scholars

Many U.S. universities offer opportunities for those who already hold a doctoral degree to pursue further research. They may also allow visiting fellows to audit graduate-level courses while having access to academic facilities for personal research. For specific information and application procedures, contact the university admissions office and the appropriate department directly.

Booklet Two in this series, *Graduate and Professional Study and Research*, contains more detailed information on opportunities for visiting scholars at U.S. universities and institutes, including the U.S. Department of State's Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program. Since most visiting fellows are self-funded or have support from an outside source, we recommend that you consult the funding directories available for reference at EducationUSA advising centers worldwide.

Professional Short-Term Study

A number of public, and many private, training institutions in the United States offer short-

term, intensive training programs designed for professionals; some are specifically designed to meet the needs of professionals from outside the United States. These programs do not lead to a degree, but instead provide a certificate verifying the professional knowledge and skills gained by completing the program.

Professional short-term programs last between a few days and an academic year, and meet daily for six to eight hours. They are practical and experiential in orientation, with an emphasis on case studies and activities outside the classroom. A program might include hands-on work experience, site visits, opportunities to network with U.S. counterparts, and application of theory to your own professional situation.

Professional short-term training is expensive but cost-effective. For example, the number of classroom hours in a one-week, short-term training program is approximately equal to the number of classroom hours in a 14-week course that meets for a few hours per week.

Because of the range of organizations that offer training and the variety of programs offered, finding information about professional training programs often

requires more research than other types of short-term study. The nearest EducationUSA advising center is a good place to start. Other possible sources of information and advice include your employer, professional associations, and home country government agencies. As appropriate, you can also contact suppliers of computer or technical equipment for your field, teaching/research hospitals, or, for public service fields, U.S. government organizations and offices.

Review

- Begin planning short-term study in the United States 12 to 18 months in advance, and identify several programs that meet your requirements. Make sure that the programs you choose are accredited, and check in advance that they will be recognized in your home country upon your return.
- High school exchange programs last from a few weeks to an academic year, and many allow participants to live with a U.S. family.
- Vocational and technical programs meet specific, practical training requirements and prepare students for immediate employment. They lead to cer-

tificates of completion or diplomas, not degrees.

- Opportunities for short-term study at U.S. universities include semester- or year-long university-to-university exchange programs, non-degree or special student study, summer study, and opportunities for scholars and fellows.
- Summer schools and institutes in the United States offer the chance to take courses for personal enrichment or general professional development, rather than to earn a degree.
- Colleges, universities, and training institutions throughout the

United States offer intensive programs designed to meet the specific training needs of professionals. They last from a few days to an academic year.

Useful Websites

Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange
<http://www.alliance-exchange.org>

Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET)
<http://www.csiet.org>

Fulbright Program
<http://fulbright.state.gov>

J-1 Exchange Visitor Programs
<http://exchanges.state.gov/jexchanges/>



English Language Programs

“I studied English in the United States for four months in 2007. The EducationUSA adviser and I spent lots of time investigating programs and departments, accommodations, and visa arrangements. EducationUSA advising centers can help you make the most of U.S. executive education programs.”

— Intensive English student from Colombia

The United States is the most popular destination for international students seeking to learn English or to improve their English skills. Hundreds of U.S. educational institutions offer Eng-

lish language programs. These programs provide a variety of courses, from academic English for university-bound students to language and culture courses for travelers. This chapter includes information on how to choose the best program for you and where to find additional sources of information.

Choosing an English Language Program

High-quality English language programs have professionally trained teachers, an excellent curriculum, and superior study facilities. Such facilities may include

classrooms, libraries, laboratories, computers, and other equipment. As a prospective student, you should examine the following criteria carefully to help you decide whether a program is appropriate for you: program type, accreditation, program quality, curriculum, length of study, location and setting, class structure, cost, and admission requirements.

Program Types

There are three main types of English language programs available in the United States:

Intensive English Programs (IEPs): These programs generally require 20 to 30 hours per week in the classroom and include classroom instruction, small group discussions, language labs, and out-of-class work. Some intensive courses allow students to attend regular academic classes in subjects outside the English-as-a-second-language curriculum. Most programs are developed as pre-academic preparatory courses, designed to prepare students for admission into a U.S. college or university.

Semi-intensive English Programs: Like IEPs, semi-intensive courses include classroom instruction, small group work, language labs, and out-of-class work, but

students usually also take academic courses in subjects other than English. Some schools require students to take semi-intensive English-as-a-second-language (ESL) courses to improve their English proficiency if their Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores were sufficient for admission but not high enough to enable them to complete advanced coursework and fully engage with other students and faculty.

Professional English Programs: Many private English language programs, and some university-based programs, are tailored to fit the needs of professionals. These may include programs in business English or special certificate programs in fields such as law, engineering, education, medicine, architecture, computer science, aerospace, hospitality management, or travel. Internships with U.S. businesses are available with some programs.

This chapter will focus on Intensive English Programs (IEPs).

Accreditation

There are two specialized accrediting bodies for Intensive English Programs in the United States: the Accrediting Council for

Continuing Education and Training (ACCET) and the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA). The nearest EducationUSA advising center can tell you more about recognition of English language program certificates in your country and whether the programs in which you are interested are appropriately accredited. See chapter 4 for more detailed information on accreditation.

Program Quality

Two professional organizations for Intensive English Programs have established standards that all member programs must meet: the Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP) and the American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP). Make sure the programs you are considering are members of UCIEP or AAIEP. The UCIEP and AAIEP websites include information about their member institutions and programs.

It is also important to know the academic standing of your prospective teachers. Check program brochures, catalogs, or websites to see what degrees the teachers of a particular program have earned. Look for institutions whose teachers have degrees in English

as a second language (ESL) or applied linguistics. You can also ask about teachers' involvement with professional associations focused on English as a second language or international education.

Curriculum

Most language program curricula are divided into levels, starting with courses for beginners who have never studied English and progressing to courses for advanced students who are refining their skills in preparation for beginning studies at a university or college in the United States. A typical language program curriculum is designed to improve students' understanding and use of English in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Some language programs focus exclusively on English for academic purposes, while others concentrate on preparation for such examinations as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and the Test of Spoken English (TSE).

Length of Study

How long will it take to achieve the language skills you need? It is difficult to determine how long a student will need to spend in an IEP. At the beginning of

each program, all students take a placement exam so they can start their studies at the appropriate level. Some students reach the level they need in as little as one or two terms/semesters, while others take longer.

Location and Setting

In addition to the geographic location, you should consider the setting in which a program is offered and find out what services are available. There are three common models:

- programs run within a department of a university or college, such as the English language department;
- privately owned language schools associated with a university or college and located on or near the campus; and
- private schools not connected with a college or university.

Find out whether a program has a connection with an academic institution, what student services are available, and how the program will meet your academic advising, housing, health, and social needs. IEP students who attend a program on a traditional U.S. college or university campus are typically offered use of the insti-

tution's dormitory housing, advising, and health services. Private language schools usually offer students a variety of housing options, provide academic advising and orientation counseling, and arrange health services for their students. A good-quality IEP, regardless of its setting, will clearly state what services it provides — either by a university or by the language school itself.

Class Structure

Before choosing a program, consider the following:

- What is the average class size?
- How many students are there per teacher?
- Is there a standard policy concerning the number of students with the same native language who are placed in one class?

Class size and student-to-teacher ratio can indicate the level of personal attention students receive. Having classmates from many language backgrounds (not just their own) usually helps students learn English more quickly.

Cost

Besides tuition, programs may require payment for student fees,

housing, board (meals), books, health insurance (mandatory for most programs), and other miscellaneous expenses. Many programs require an application fee, which is often nonrefundable. Some programs also require a tuition deposit. Find out the total cost of a program before you apply.

Admission Requirements

Admission requirements vary from program to program, but most IEPs require students to have completed secondary school and to be able to prove they can pay the full cost of the program. Some programs ask for additional information such as educational transcripts and documentation of English proficiency, and others require students to agree to devote the majority of their time to language studies while in the program.

Admission to Academic Programs

Some institutions in the United States offer conditional or provisional admission to academic programs to applicants whose academic or professional qualifications are very good, but whose English language skills need improvement. This does not automatically mean you have been

accepted into other academic programs offered by a university or college.

For international students, conditional or provisional admission most often means that a student has demonstrated sufficient academic or professional qualifications, but must complete additional English language courses or submit an acceptable score from a standardized English language proficiency test such as the TOEFL, IELTS, or TSE before enrolling in regular courses. Since it may be more difficult to obtain a visa based on conditional or provisional admission, be sure to read the documents you receive from the admissions office carefully and be prepared to explain the conditions of admission during your visa interview.

Some institutions require international students to take English language placement tests after they arrive on campus. Students then enroll in regular programs of study and/or additional English language courses based on the results of the placement tests.

Student Visas

The final step toward studying English in the United States is obtaining a visa. You will most likely need to apply for an F-1 student

visa from your local U.S. consulate or embassy. Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*, covers the visa application process in detail. It is available on the EducationUSA website at <http://www.educationusa.state.gov>.

Review

- Intensive English Programs (IEPs) range from beginner to advanced in level. The length of time needed in a program varies depending on students' goals and English skills at the start of the program.
- Programs may be run by a university department, a private organization at or near an academic institution, or by a private school not connected with a college or university.
- Find out about class size, student-to-teacher ratio, and how many students with the same language are placed in each class.
- Admission to an English language program at a university or college does not mean that you have been granted admission to an academic program at that same institution.
- An F-1 student visa will almost always be required for study in an English language program. Consult the program's sponsors and an EducationUSA advising center for more information on visa requirements and procedures.

Useful Websites

American Association of Intensive English Programs

<http://www.aaiep.org>

Commission on English Language Program Accreditation

<http://www.cea-accredit.org>

University and College Intensive English Programs

<http://www.uciiep.org>

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

<http://www.tesol.org>



Distance Education

This chapter provides information on distance education, how to choose the most appropriate program, and where and how to locate more information.

What is Distance Education?

Distance education is a type of formal learning in which the student and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time. It may be synchronous or asynchronous. If distance education is synchronous, students receive instruction at a particular time and, usually, at specific locations.

If distance education is asynchronous, students receive instruction wherever and whenever they desire, as long as they have access to a computer with the required specifications and a high-speed broadband Internet connection.

Distance education can be accomplished through one or more of the following means:

- voicemail;
- one-way or interactive radio, television, satellite, audio/video transmission/conferencing;

- audio/video recording;
- computer-aided instruction; and/or
- the Internet.
- **professional:** they may want to develop or upgrade skills and knowledge to stay competitive, but they cannot get away from their current job to enhance their future possibilities;

Many distance education programs also require occasional attendance by the student on the campus of the college/university offering the program. Others simulate the classroom experience through Internet chat-rooms, video-conferencing, and “net meetings” in which students can discuss topics and get immediate feedback from the instructor.

Whatever form of distance education you choose, it is important to find out how the materials will be delivered so you can plan how you will fulfill the requirements for participating in class and for completing and returning the coursework.

Why Choose Distance Education?

Students enroll in distance education programs for many reasons:

- **logistical:** they cannot attend a campus away from their home;
- **familial:** they have child-care or elder-care obligations;

- **financial:** they cannot afford to pay high tuition and fees; or
- **geographic:** the program may be offered at a location that is not feasible to attend for economic, cultural, or political reasons.

Skills Needed to Succeed

Experience shows that those most likely to succeed in a distance education program are self-disciplined students who like to work independently and have some degree of privacy. Because of their heavy reliance on computers and the Internet, distance education programs also require certain technical skills. In fact, many students fail to complete their distance education programs or transfer to more traditional campus-based degree programs because they lack the necessary skills or do not have access to a working environment suitable for distance learning.

Ask yourself the following questions before enrolling in a distance education program:

- Am I self-motivated and an independent learner?
 - Does my schedule permit me to devote the necessary hours to study?
 - Do I have a place at home or at work that I can claim as my own for extended periods of study and communication with the program? Will family members or others around me respect my need to spend time on my own?
 - Do I have the required English language skills?
 - Do I have the necessary computer/technical skills to complete the program successfully, or do I need training?
 - Do I have someone to assist me if I experience technical problems? (Accredited distance education programs in the United States should be able to extend support through their “help desks” electronically or by toll-free phone.)
- the points you need to consider before applying to a program include the following:
- What are the specific educational outcomes of the program? Is earning a degree important to me, or do I want to take just a few classes to learn a new skill or to complete a certificate program to increase my professional status?
 - What is the value of distance education in my home country?
 - What are the total costs of the program? Are there any additional expenses I might incur? Is there financial aid available?
 - Is occasional on-campus attendance in the United States possible for me, or do I require a program that can be completed entirely from my home country without traveling to the United States?
 - Is the program asynchronous (any time) or synchronous (real time)? If the latter, would the time difference between my country and the campus in the United States prevent me from taking part?
 - How is the program information delivered, and what type of equipment will I need? Does my

Choosing a Distance Education Program

Most successful distance education students have done plenty of research to find the program that is right for them. Some of

equipment meet the required technical specifications?

- What academic or technical assistance is provided?

What Types of Programs are Available?

Whether you are looking to improve a particular skill, improve your general knowledge, earn a certificate, or earn an undergraduate or graduate degree, there are programs that could serve your needs.

Distance education is expanding and evolving, and many institutions see it as a form of education that can be adapted to suit many of their programs and degree offerings.

What Types of Institutions Offer Distance Education?

The institutions that offer distance education programs are almost as varied as the programs themselves. Programs are available through traditional U.S. colleges and universities, “virtual” universities, two-year junior or community colleges, and professional bodies, as well as through private corporations and other organizations. Virtual universities offer no campus-based programs at all; every program they

run is a distance education program. The number of virtual universities is increasing all the time, and most hold the same kind of accreditation as traditional, campus-based institutions. (See the “Accreditation” section later in this chapter.)

How Much Does Distance Education Cost?

Costs for distance education vary considerably depending on the type of program. Distance education can save you the expenses of travel, room, and board, but the academic fees are usually the same as those of traditional on-campus programs.

If a period of on-campus residency is required during the course of the program, include the cost of travel and accommodations in your budget. You should also inquire about the costs of learning materials needed to complete each course, and factor in courier/shipping charges, as applicable. For further information on calculating the costs of studying for a U.S. degree, see Booklets One and Two in this series, *Undergraduate Study* and *Graduate and Professional Study and Research*. Both are available on the Internet at <http://www.educationusa.state.gov> and at your nearest EducationUSA advising center.

If there is a campus residency requirement for your program, you will probably need a student visa to travel to the United States. Confirm what type of visa is required with the institution you are interested in attending. Contact an EducationUSA advising center and a U.S. consulate or embassy in your home country to find out about the requirements for applying for a U.S. visa in your country and any costs involved. For further information, read the section on applying for a visa in Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*.

Admission Requirements

Some people believe that distance education programs have no requirements for admission or that there are no prerequisites for an online degree program. Although this might be true in some cases, application procedures for enrollment into a quality distance education program are usually the same as those for traditional campuses.

For admission into distance education programs, many institutions require satisfactory scores on standardized tests such as the SAT, the ACT University-

Entrance Exam (The ACT), the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), and/or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Application forms, similar to the ones you would fill out for an on-site program, are often required, along with transcripts showing past educational performance. Letters of recommendation, application essays, statements of purpose, plus some other requirements, which vary from program to program, are often mandatory.

Many programs require applicants to complete surveys and exercises in computer literacy. Students need to acquire a certain level of technological fluency for active participation in this learning environment.

Once you are accepted into a distance education program, find out how you will receive course materials and what the requirements are for promotion to the next level. Depending on the number of credits you transfer into the distance education program, it will probably take you at least as long to complete the program as it would to complete a campus-based program.

Other Things to Consider

Quality of the Program

Research the history and quality of the program. Consider the following:

- How long has the institution been enrolling students in this program?
- Review the vision, mission, goals and objectives of the school; consider its history and track record.
- Find out whether the institution offers effective 24/7 web-based student support with online help desk services. Schools committed to excellence in online learning delivery have sound frameworks of academic and administrative support.
- The admission requirements, standards for selection, and expected level of achievement should be the same for distance education and traditional students.
- How does the variety of courses offered compare with similar programs at other institutions?
- What is the average length of time it takes for a student to complete this program?

- What have graduates of this program gone on to do, particularly in terms of transferring to other degree programs or finding employment?
- How can I contact some of these graduates and their employers to talk about their learning experiences and their preparation for a career?
- Where can I find evaluations of this program?
- Will this program be recognized in my home country?

Accreditation

Check the accreditation status before enrolling in a distance education program to be sure that your degree will be recognized by employers, government entities in the United States and in your home country, or other institutions of higher learning. Information specific to the accreditation of distance learning programs is on the next page. Chapter 4 provides further information on accreditation in general.

The U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) recognize a number of national and regional bodies as accreditors of higher education

programs, including distance education programs.

Distance education programs offered by an accredited college or university are included in the institution's overall accreditation. There is no such thing as a "partially accredited" institution, and distance education programs must meet the same standards and requirements as other programs.

"Regional accreditation" is the most commonly held type of institutional accreditation in the United States; it is carried out by six regional accrediting bodies, which have adopted regulations to ensure that students who earn degrees through distance education programs receive an education equivalent to the education they would receive on-site at a U.S. campus. Regional accreditation is possible even for virtual universities that have no physical library, campus, or full-time faculty. These universities must demonstrate that their offerings are comparable to those of a traditional campus, that the academic qualifications of course designers are appropriate to their field, and that students have guaranteed access to information resources beyond those generally available to the public through the Internet.

If the institution offering a distance education program is not regionally accredited, ask for a list of universities or employers that recognize degrees or credits from the institution and verify any information you receive. Find out what provisions have been made in case the program is discontinued before you complete your studies. Keep in mind that many government agencies and public/private employers will not accept degrees from institutions not accredited by a recognized body.

Security of the Program

Academic dishonesty and ethical behavior are major concerns in an online learning environment. Gauging whether the student completing the exam is the same person who took a course or whether the person taking a course is a bona fide student can be a challenge in distance education. Proponents of distance education believe that trained and experienced faculty who are familiar with their students' abilities and learning/writing styles can detect inconsistencies.

A variety of methods are available to maintain checks and tighten security. Some courses use plagiarism prevention and detection software or tools, and others utilize biometric measures such

as retina scans or thumbprints to make sure that the people taking tests are indeed the people who sign up for courses. Still others require students to take proctored exams at approved locations in the United States.

Review

- Distance education is a type of formal learning in which the student and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time.
- There is a wide range of distance education programs and of institutions that offer these programs in the United States.
- The cost of tuition for distance education programs is similar to on-site programs. Application procedures are also usually the same as for campus-based programs.
- Be sure to ask where recent graduates are employed and find out if the degree, certificate, or diploma will be recognized in your home country. Students attending institutions that are not accredited by a recognized body will find it difficult to have their degrees

accepted by U.S. and home country government agencies, other educational institutions, and many private employers.

Useful Websites

GetEducated.com — Adult Education and Distance Learner's Resource Center
<http://www.geteducated.com>

Degree.net — The Online Degree Guide Center
<http://www.degree.net>

Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) — Recognized Accrediting Body for Postsecondary Distance Education Institutions
<http://detc.org>

United States Distance Learning Association
<http://www.usdla.org>

The American Journal of Distance Education
<http://www.ajde.com>

The Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C) — Consortium of Individuals, Institutions and Organizations Committed to Quality Online Education
www.sloan-c.org



Accreditation

Accreditation is the system of recognition and quality assurance for institutions and programs of higher education in the United States. When deciding on a program of study, one of your main concerns should be whether the program is properly accredited. This chapter explains what accreditation is, how it happens, who carries it out, and why it matters to you.

Maintaining Educational Standards in the United States

In most countries, the central government is responsible for maintaining the quality standards of institutions of higher education. In the United States, each U.S. state has its own system of licensing public and private institu-

tions of higher education. Licensing requirements vary greatly from state to state, so licensing by a state education department is not a reliable indicator of whether an institution has met the same standards as other schools in the region or in the country.

How can you know if a U.S. institution or program has met certain standards for quality? In the United States, institutions and programs may demonstrate that they meet and maintain certain educational standards by becoming “accredited.” Accreditation is carried out by private, non-governmental organizations called accrediting bodies or accrediting associations, which determine and regulate educational standards. To be an accredited institution of higher education in the United States, an institution has to meet and adhere to the standards of a particular body or association. Being licensed in a particular state is not the same as being accredited.

Why Accreditation Is Important

If the school you attend is not properly accredited, you may find that your degree is not recognized in the United States or other countries, or by other universities, professional associations, employ-

ers, and government ministries and departments.

Before you apply to study in the United States, check with your home country’s department or ministry of education about whether there are any restrictions on the recognition of U.S. degrees or courses completed at U.S. universities. In particular, ask if there are specific requirements concerning the accreditation of U.S. institutions or programs. Once you have identified institutions in the United States to which you intend to apply, check again with your home country’s department or ministry of education to determine whether a degree or academic credits from those institutions will be recognized.

Recognized Accrediting Bodies

There is no legal restriction on the use of the words “accredited,” “accrediting body,” or “accrediting association” in the United States. As a result, it is important that you check whether an institution and its programs hold accreditation from a “recognized” accrediting body or bodies. To be considered recognized, an accrediting body should meet one or both of the following criteria:

- It is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). To find out, consult the CHEA and ASPA websites or look in *Accredited Institutions of Post-secondary Education* (see “Additional Resources” at the end of this booklet). Copies of this directory are available at EducationUSA advising centers worldwide.
 - It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. While the department is not involved in the process of accrediting institutions, it does publish a database of accredited programs and institutions at <http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation>.
- the institution must control its own financial resources, employ adequately prepared faculty and instructional staff, admit only those students whose qualifications make them able to benefit from the programs offered, and present educational programs in a coherent and current manner;
 - be effective in achieving its immediate objectives; and
 - give evidence that it will continue to achieve those objectives for the near future.

Accrediting associations assess the performance of an institution or program compared to its stated mission and the accrediting body’s standards.

Recognized accrediting bodies follow a three-step process to ensure quality:

What Accreditation Signifies

Specific requirements and standards vary between accrediting bodies. However, any institution or program accredited by a recognized accrediting body must:

- have an overall stated purpose (often called a mission) that defines the students it serves and the objectives of the institution’s or program’s activities;
 - control the resources necessary to achieve its purposes; that is,
- The institution carries out a self-study and submits a report to the accrediting body. The self-study and report address the institution’s mission, academic programs, faculty, financial, and other tangible resources, information resources, student services, physical facilities, and system of governance.
 - An outside group of academics visits the institution to validate

what the institution has reported in its self-study, determine whether the institution or program meets the accreditation standards of the agency, make suggestions for the improvement of the institution or program, and submit a report for consideration by the accrediting association's governing body.

- The governing body decides whether or not to grant accreditation. Accreditation is never partial, and there is no difference between the terms “fully accredited” and “accredited.”

The process does not end once an institution has successfully had an accreditation visit and decision. Institutions or programs must file annual reports, reply to rulings made by the accrediting body, and undergo regular visits at least once every five to ten years. They must also notify their accreditors if they undergo any significant change — for example, in ownership, mission, location of campuses, or offering of a degree at a higher level.

Accreditation is not a way to rank member institutions. Rather, it is a process that validates the integrity of an educational institution. For the student, it is an indication that the institution or program meets certain standards of excel-

lence. Accrediting associations require institutions to engage in constant self-assessment in order to keep their programs as current as possible. Such assessment ensures that the institution's graduates are prepared for the current needs of society, and that they have developed the capacity for continued learning.

Types of Accreditation

There are two types of accreditation for degree-granting institutions in the United States: institutional and programmatic. Institutional accreditation reviews and accredits the whole institution. Programmatic accreditation, sometimes called professional accreditation or specialized accreditation, deals with programs, departments, or schools within an institution; for example, a physical therapy program, a business school, or a school of engineering. Several accrediting associations or bodies carry out each of these types of accreditation. A single institution may be accredited by both types of accreditors and by multiple institutional or programmatic accreditors.

Institutional Accreditation

There are two types of institutional accreditation: regional (the primary type used) and national.

Six organizations, which cover different geographic regions of the country, carry out the regional accreditation process. Another six, which cover career-related and faith-related programs, carry out national accreditation. For a complete list please visit the CHEA or U.S. Department of Education websites.

While the requirements for regional accreditation vary between different areas of the United States, they are generally considered more stringent than those for national accreditation. Some institutions hold national rather than regional accreditation because they are unwilling or unable to meet the standards of regional accreditation. For example, regional accrediting bodies require that between one-quarter and one-third of the institution's curriculum be allocated to courses in general education (humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences); this is a problem for some specialized institutions. Another example involves colleges that are controlled by religious denominations that require that certain concepts (for example, creation) be taken on faith; since regional accrediting associations typically require that institutions allow faculty and students the academic freedom to pursue all ideas, these institutions may not be able to

meet the standards of regional accreditation.

If you are considering a U.S. institution that holds national accreditation but not regional accreditation, be sure to ask the following questions:

- Will my home country's government, professional associations, and employers recognize a degree from an institution accredited by a national accrediting body but not a regional accrediting body?
- Will educational institutions in other countries recognize a degree from a nationally accredited U.S. institution?
- Have graduates of this U.S. institution been able to use their degrees to do what I want to do with my degree? For example, how many have gained entry to a particular field of employment or were accepted into a more advanced degree program offered at another institution?

Note that many regionally accredited U.S. institutions do not recognize credits or degrees earned at other institutions that are nationally accredited or accredited in another region. Be sure to check about this if you decide to transfer from one U.S.

institution to another part way through a degree program, or if you plan to pursue degrees at different U.S. institutions; for example, a bachelor's degree from one school and a master's degree from another.

Programmatic Accreditation

Programmatic accrediting bodies accredit specialized and professional degree programs or departments rather than whole institutions. Very often, such programs or departments are offered, or are based, at institutions that already have institutional accreditation, so you can be assured of their legitimacy and general quality.

For a list of the recognized programmatic accrediting bodies in the United States, please visit the CHEA and/or ASPA websites. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes national and regional accrediting bodies and only a limited number of programmatic accreditation agencies.

For some professions, including those dealing with health (for example, medicine or dentistry) or safety (for example, engineering), you must be a graduate of a program with programmatic accreditation in order to practice in a specific field. If you are considering working in a particular

profession, check with the licensing body in your home country or where you intend to practice to determine whether programmatic accreditation is a prerequisite for practice before enrolling in a degree program.

Even if programmatic accreditation is not required for licensure, specialized accreditation offers a guarantee that both the program and the faculty are qualified and current in their profession, as judged by the accrediting body.

Institutions Not Holding Recognized Accreditation

Students at institutions that do not hold some form of recognized regional or national accreditation are likely to encounter difficulties in the following areas:

- They may be ineligible for many loans and scholarships, as well as some other academic honors. For example, many foreign governments will grant educational loans only to students who are attending a regionally accredited institution.
- It may be difficult to transfer credits to, or to have their degrees recognized by, other U.S. institutions that do hold accepted regional or national accreditation.

- Governments of other countries will often not recognize degrees from U.S. institutions that do not hold regional or national accreditation.
- Many private employers will not recognize credits and degrees earned at an institution that is not regionally accredited.

In considering institutions that do not hold accreditation from a recognized body, you need to be aware of two additional factors:

- Recognized accrediting bodies have strict policies to avoid any conflict of interest between the institution being evaluated and those who are doing the evaluating. For example, evaluators cannot be students, alumni, owners, or employees of the institution undergoing the evaluation. This integrity in the accrediting process cannot be guaranteed if the accrediting body is not recognized.
- If you attend an institution that does not hold accreditation from a recognized accrediting body, not only may employers and governments not accept your credits and degree, but you also may not receive as current or comprehensive an education as that offered by institutions accredited by recognized bodies.

If you are considering studying at an institution that does not have proper accreditation, ask for the names of alumni who have used their degrees to do something similar to what you plan to do with yours. Then contact the alumni to ask about their experiences.

If you have any doubt about the accreditation status of a U.S. institution or a U.S. degree program offered in your home country, contact the accrediting body of the institution in the United States directly, or speak to an EducationUSA adviser for further information.

Review

- Accreditation is the system of recognition and quality assurance for institutions and programs in the United States.
- Accreditation is a voluntary process in the United States and is not carried out by a central governing body such as the U.S. Department of Education. Licensing of higher education institutions by state departments of education is not the same as accreditation.
- Recognition of a U.S. degree in the United States and in other countries is often determined by the accreditation status of the

institution or program of study. International students should check with their home country ministry of education, council of higher education, or other regulatory body regarding restrictions on recognition of U.S. degrees.

- The process of accreditation requires institutions: to have an appropriate mission; to control the resources to achieve that mission; to meet that mission effectively; and to give evidence that they will continue to meet the mission for the foreseeable future.
- Accrediting bodies require institutions or programs to carry out a detailed self-study and submit a report on that study for approval by the accrediting body. The process of accreditation is ongoing and includes periodic reports and inspections to ensure standards are maintained.
- Accreditation can be institutional, covering the whole institution, or programmatic (sometimes called professional or specialized), covering a program or department within an institution.
- Institutional accreditation may be either regional or national (less common). If an institution holds national accreditation,

students should investigate by whom their degrees, or any credits they earn, will be recognized, as recognition can vary considerably.

- Programmatic accrediting bodies are recognized by either the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). Programmatic accreditation of a degree program, department, or school may be a requirement for practicing in certain professions.

Useful Websites

Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA)
<http://www.aspa-usa.org>

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA)
<http://www.chea.org>

U.S. Department of Education
Database of Accredited Postsecondary Institutions and Programs
<http://ope.ed.gov/accreditation>

* See the CHEA and/or ASPA websites for links to regional, national faith-related, national career-related, and programmatic accrediting organizations.

Glossary of Terms

Academic Adviser (AA): A member of a college faculty who helps and advises students on academic matters.

Academic Year: The period of formal instruction, usually September to May; may be divided into terms of varying lengths — semesters, trimesters, or quarters.

Accreditation: System of recognition and quality assurance for institutions and programs of higher education in the United States.

ACT University-Entrance Exam: A multiple-choice test of English, math, reading, and science reasoning (plus an optional writing component) used for admission into undergraduate programs.

Add/Drop: A process at the beginning of a term whereby students can delete and add classes with an instructor's permission.

Advance Registration: A process of choosing classes in advance of other students.

Affidavit of Support: An official document proving a promise of funding from an individual or organization.

Assistantship: A study grant of financial assistance to a graduate student that is offered in return for certain services in teaching or laboratory supervision as a teaching assistant, or for services in research as a research assistant.

Associate Degree: The degree awarded after a two-year period of study; it can be either terminal (vocational) or transfer (the first two years of a bachelor's degree).

Attestation: Official affirmation that a degree or transcript is genuine. Usually signed by a recognized expert or witness.

Audit: To take a class without receiving credit toward a degree.

Authentication: Process of determining whether something is, in fact, what it is declared to be. Incoming students are often required to provide a document of authentication for academic transcripts or previous degrees when applying to a program of study in the United States.

Bachelor's Degree: Degree awarded upon completion of approximately four years of full-time study in the liberal arts and sciences or professional subjects.

Class Rank: A number or ratio indicating a student's academic standing in his or her graduating class. A student who ranks first in a class of 100 students would report his or her class rank as 1/100, while a student ranking last would report 100/100. Class rank may also be expressed in percentiles (for example, the top 25 percent, the lower 50 percent).

Coed: A college or university that admits both men and women; also refers to a dormitory that houses both men and women.

College: A postsecondary institution that provides an undergraduate education and, in some cases, master's level

degrees. College, in a separate sense, is a division of a university; for example, College of Business.

College Catalog: An official publication giving information about a university's academic programs, facilities, entrance requirements, and student life.

Core Requirements: Mandatory courses required for completion of the degree.

Course: Regularly scheduled class sessions of one to five hours (or more) per week during a term. A degree program is made up of a specified number of required and elective courses and varies from institution to institution.

Credits: Units that universities use to record the completion of courses (with passing grades) that are required for an academic degree. The catalog defines the number and kinds of credits that are required for the university's degrees and states the value of each course offered in terms of "credit hours" or "units."

Day Student: A student who lives in accommodations not administered by the college and off the campus grounds. He or she travels to campus every day for classes.

Degree: Diploma or title conferred by a college, university, or professional school upon completion of a prescribed program of studies.

Department: Administrative subdivision of a school, college, or university through which instruction in a certain field of study is given (such as English department or history department).

Designated School Official (DSO): A Designated School Official (DSO) is the person on campus who gathers and reports information on international students to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and assists international students in the visa and

employment authorization process. Your DSO's name will be listed on your I-20 or DS-2019.

Dissertation: Thesis written on an original topic of research, usually presented as one of the final requirements for a doctoral degree (Ph.D.).

Distance Education: A type of formal learning in which the student and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time. It may be accomplished via telephone, radio, television, audio-video recordings, computer programs, and/or the Internet.

Doctorate (Ph.D.): The highest academic degree conferred by a university to students who have completed at least three years of graduate study beyond the bachelor's and/or master's degree and who have demonstrated their academic ability in oral and written examinations and through original research presented in the form of a dissertation.

Dormitories: Housing facilities on the campus of a college or university reserved for students. A typical dormitory would include student rooms, bathrooms, common rooms, and possibly a cafeteria. Also known as "dorms" for short.

Electives: Courses that students choose to take for credit toward their intended degree, as distinguished from courses that they are required to take.

Extracurricular Activities: Nonacademic activities undertaken outside university courses.

Faculty: People who teach courses at U.S. colleges and universities. Faculty members may include professors, associate professors, assistant professors, and instructors.

Fees: An amount charged by universities, in addition to tuition, to cover costs of institutional services.

Fellowship: A form of financial assistance, usually awarded to a graduate student. Generally, no service is required of the student in return.

Final Exam: Often referred to as a “final,” a final exam is a cumulative exam on a particular course subject encompassing all material covered throughout the duration of the course.

Financial aid: A general term that includes all types of money, loans, and work/study programs offered to a student to help pay tuition, fees, and living expenses.

Fraternities: Male social, academic, and philanthropic organizations found on many U.S. campuses.

Freshman: A first-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

GMAT: Graduate Management Admission Test, usually required for applicants to business or management programs.

Grade Point Average: A system of recording academic achievement based on the numerical grade received in each course and the number of credit hours studied.

GRE: Graduate Record Examination; primarily multiple-choice test of verbal and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing used for admission into graduate programs.

High School: The U.S. term for secondary school.

Higher Education: Postsecondary education at colleges, universities, professional schools, technical institutes, etc. Education beyond high school.

Honors Program: A challenging program for students with high grades.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS): An English language proficiency examination of applicants whose native language is not English.

International Student Adviser (ISA): The person at a university who is in charge of providing information and guidance to foreign students in areas of government regulation, visas, academic regulations, social customs, language, financial or housing problems, travel plans, insurance, and legal matters.

Junior: A third-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

Liberal Arts: A term referring to academic studies of subjects in the humanities, the social sciences, and the physical sciences, with the goal of developing students' verbal, writing, and reasoning skills.

LSAT: Law School Admission Test required of applicants to professional law programs and some postgraduate law programs in American law schools.

Major: The subject in which a student wishes to concentrate.

Master's Degree: Degree awarded upon completion of academic requirements that usually include a minimum of one year's study beyond the bachelor's degree.

MCAT: Medical College Admission Test required of applicants to U.S. medical schools.

Midterm Exam: An exam administered after half the academic term has passed that covers all class material up until that point.

Miller Analogies Test: Test of analytical thinking sometimes required for admission to graduate programs in fields such as education and psychology.

Minor: A subject in which the student takes the second greatest concentration of courses.

Non-resident Student: A student who does not meet the residence requirements of the state. Tuition fees and admission policies may differ for residents and non-residents. International students are usually classified as non-residents, and there is little possibility of changing to resident status at a later date for tuition purposes. Also referred to as an “out of state” student.

Notarization: The certification of a document (or a statement or signature) as authentic and true by a public official (known in the United States as a “notary public”) or a lawyer who is also a commissioner of oaths.

Placement Test: An examination used to test a student’s academic ability in a certain field so that he or she may be placed in the appropriate courses in that field. In some cases, a student may be given academic credit based on the results of a placement test.

Postdoctorate: Studies designed for those who have completed their doctorate.

Postgraduate: Usually refers to studies for individuals who have completed a graduate degree. May also be used to refer to graduate education.

Professional degree: Usually obtained after completing a bachelor’s degree; degree designed to lead into a specific profession such as medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, or law.

Prerequisites: Programs or courses that a student is required to complete before being permitted to enroll in a more advanced program or course.

Registration: Process through which students select courses to be taken during a quarter, semester, or trimester.

Resident Assistant (RA): A person who assists the residence hall director in campus dormitories and is usually the first point of contact for students with problems or queries regarding dorm life. RAs are usually students at the college who receive free accommodation and other benefits in return for their services.

Responsible Officer (RO): A Responsible Officer is the exchange program staff person who gathers and reports information on exchange visitors to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and assists in the visa process. The RO's name is listed on the DS-2019.

Sabbatical: Leave with pay granted to give a faculty member an extended period of time for concentrated study.

Scholarship: A study grant of financial aid, usually given at the undergraduate level, that may take the form of a waiver of tuition and/or fees.

SAT: A primarily multiple-choice test of mathematics and English that is used for admission into an undergraduate program.

School: A term that usually refers to elementary, middle, or secondary school. Also used in place of the words "college," "university," or "institution," or as a general term for any place of education; for example, law school, or graduate school.

Semester: Period of study lasting approximately 15 to 16 weeks or one-half the academic year.

Seminar: A form of small group instruction, combining independent research and class discussions under the guidance of a professor.

Senior: A fourth-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

Social Security Number (SSN): A number issued to people by the U.S. government for payroll deductions for old age, survivors, and disability insurance. Anyone who works regularly must obtain a Social Security Number. Many institutions use this number as the student identification number.

Sophomore: A second-year student at a secondary school, college, or university.

Sororities: Female social, academic, and philanthropic organizations found on many U.S. campuses.

Special student: A student who is taking classes but is not enrolled in a degree program.

Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS): An Internet-based system that maintains data on foreign students and exchange visitors before and during their stay in the United States. It is part of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) managed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Syllabus: An outline of topics covered in an academic course.

Teaching Assistant (TA): A graduate student who acts as instructor for an undergraduate course in his or her field, in return for some form of financial aid from the university.

Tenure: A guarantee that a faculty member will remain employed by a college or university until retirement except in the case of very unusual circumstances. Tenure is granted to senior faculty members who have demonstrated a worthy research and publication record. Its purpose is to preserve academic freedom.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): An English language proficiency examination of applicants whose native language is not English.

Thesis: A written work containing the results of research on a specific topic prepared by a candidate for a bachelor's or master's degree.

Transcripts: A certified copy (see "Notarization") of a student's educational record.

Transfer: The process of moving from one university to another to complete a degree.

Tuition: The money an institution charges for instruction and training (does not include the cost of books).

University: A postsecondary institution that offers both undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Zip Code: A series of numbers in mailing addresses that designates postal delivery districts in the United States.

Additional Resources

Contact your nearest EducationUSA advising center to find out more about these and other resources.

Short-term Study

Advisory List of International Educational Travel and Exchange Programs. Published annually. Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), Alexandria, VA.

Bricker's International Directory: Executive Education and Development Programs. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

Funding for United States Study: A Guide for International Students and Professionals. Published annually. Institute of International Education, New York, NY.

Peterson's Two-Year Colleges. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

Peterson's Vocational and Technical Schools Set. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

English Language Programs

Intensive English USA. Published annually. Institute of International Education, New York, NY.

A Year In the Life of an ESL (English as a Second Language) Student: Idioms and Vocabulary You Can't Live Without, Edward J. Francis. 2006. Trafford Publishing, Bloomington, IN.

Distance Education

Bear's Guide to Earning Degrees by Distance Learning, Mariah Bear with Thomas Nixon. 2006. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.

Campus-Free College Degrees: Thorson's Guide to Accredited College Degrees through Distance Learning, Marcie Kisner Thorson. 2000. Thorson Guides, Tulsa, OK.

Peterson's Guide to Online Learning. 2006. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

Virtual College, Pam Dixon. 1996. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.

Accreditation

Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education. Published Annually. American Council on Education, Washington, DC.

An Overview of U.S. Accreditation, Judith S. Eaton. 2009. Council on Higher Education Accreditation, Washington, DC. PDF available at <http://chea.org/Research/index.asp#overview>

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