

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS APPLYING TO U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Generally, U.S. colleges consider you to be an “international student” if you are not a United States citizen or permanent resident of the United States. Most U.S. colleges believe that international students, by their mere presence, contribute to college communities’ diversity by virtue of their different geographic and cultural backgrounds. Applicants from countries that are under-represented at a particular college may therefore have a competitive advantage in the admissions process.

Many international students want to attend colleges that are well-known in their home countries. Often they focus only on the large state universities or prestigious colleges such as the Ivies or comparable small colleges that are becoming increasingly well-known. We urge you to look beyond the obvious, beyond the colleges that have promoted themselves most effectively internationally, to some top colleges in the United States that will undoubtedly be more famous in the future. One of the United States’ best products is university education, and there are many more centers of academic excellence than those you normally learn about in foreign countries. Some of these colleges, for instance, provide small classes and closer contact with professors. Incidentally, Harvard, Yale and Princeton-educated professors are teaching virtually everywhere in our college system. Most colleges offer relationships with teachers of the highest caliber who have contacts in our best graduate schools.

Wherever you decide to apply, you should be aware of the following aspects of the U.S. college admissions process that may impact you as an international applicant:

Student Visa

International students must obtain an F1 student visa in order to enroll in a college in the U.S. To obtain a student visa, you will need to submit a statement certifying that you, your parents or some other sponsor has sufficient funds available to pay for your annual college tuition and room/board expenses (International Student Certification of Finances). While some colleges ask that you submit this certification at the time you apply, most will ask that you do so when you commit to enroll. If you are accepted and choose to enroll, the college will issue a Certificate of Eligibility (Form I-20) that you can take to the U.S. embassy or consulate in your country to obtain your student visa. Most colleges post their Certification of Finances on their websites that you can download and complete.

Testing

In addition to the SAT or ACT, most colleges require students whose first language is not English and did not attend an English language high school to show their proficiency by submitting scores from the **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)** or other language tests. The TOEFL, is a three-hour test measuring reading, listening, grammar and writing. The Internet-based TOEFL (iBT) is the most commonly used format and is scored on a 0-120 scale (0-30 in each section). Many colleges look for a minimum total score of 80; more selective colleges will expect 100+. Note: some colleges have minimums for the individual TOEFL sections.

Many colleges will also accept results from the **International English Language Testing System (IELTS)**. The IELTS is scored on a 1-9 (9=highest) scale with most colleges requiring a minimum of 6.5 or 7.

Duolingo is a third English proficiency test option accepted by colleges. It is only one hour long and significantly less expensive than either the TOEFL or IELTS tests. Colleges typically require a score of 115-125.

Students can take the **Duolingo** and **TOEFL** tests online from their home whenever they wish. The **IELTS Indicator** test, a modified version of the IELTS test made available during the Covid pandemic, is also available online but only once per week and may not be accepted by all colleges.

Note: Some larger universities with English as a Second Language (ESL) programs may grant a conditional acceptance if your score is lower than their minimum TOEFL or IELTS and if they are otherwise satisfied with your academic credentials. In those cases, colleges will accept you provided you enroll in their ESL program and subsequently achieve their minimum TOEFL or IELTS score.

Details about the TOEFL and registration may be found at: www.ets.org/toefl.

Details about the IELTS and registration may be found at: www.ielts.org, and about Duolingo at englishtest.duolingo.com.

International students are generally subject to the same SAT/ACT requirements as U.S. students; therefore, it is best to assume that you will need to take one or the other. There are a few colleges that waive their normal SAT/ACT requirements for international applicants.

Application Forms

If you attend a school that has had relatively few students apply to U.S. colleges, you will need to explain to the appropriate school officials that they will need to send several documents as part of your application:

Transcript—the official record of your high school performance at the time you apply. Colleges also require a final transcript when you complete high school to ensure completion at a satisfactory level (so it is important to complete your final year with a strong performance, even if you have already been accepted). Colleges prefer to receive an official English translation if the original is in a different language.

Secondary School Report—in the U.S., this is typically prepared by the high school guidance or college counselor and provides an overall assessment of the applicant as a student and member of his/her school's community. If your school does not have such a counselor, you might ask the head/principal of your school to write the report IF they know you well enough to do so. Otherwise, you could ask one of your teachers.

Teacher Recommendations—if the teachers you ask to write recommendations for you do not write well in English, have their recommendations translated and ask them to send both the original and translated versions to your colleges.

Financial Aid

Other than colleges with exceptionally large endowments, relatively few colleges provide international students with need-based financial aid. However, some colleges offer merit-based aid as a means to attract highly qualified applicants, irrespective of need.