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How to **STUDY ABROAD** in the

United States



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From LA to Vegas, New York to Seattle, the US is packed with diverse landscapes, cultures, climates and thriving cities.

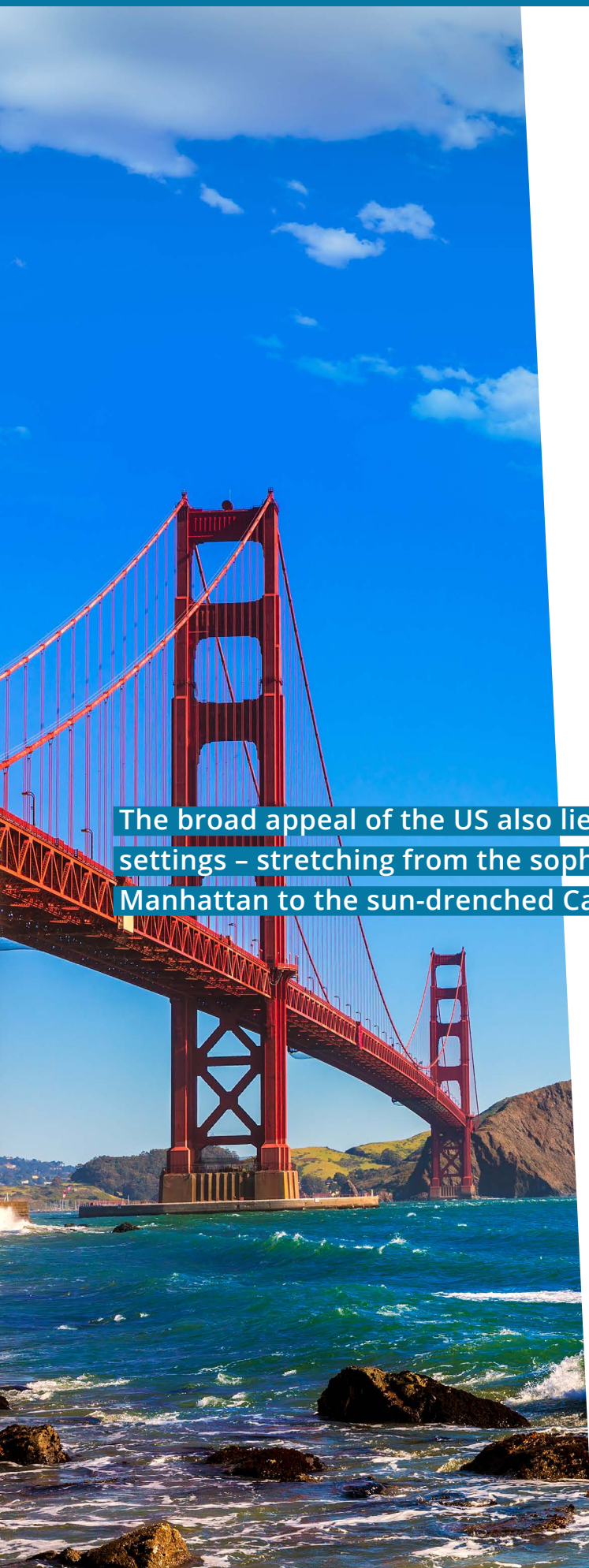
The world's fourth-largest country by area and third-largest by population, it's a world leader across the fields of business, technology and scientific development. Its immense global influence also extends into the cultural domain, thanks to the continued strength of exports such as the Hollywood film industry, along with swathes of successful international retailers and brands.

The US also has an unbeatable number of internationally recognized universities, with more than 150 US universities featured in the **QS World University Rankings®**. So it's not hard to see why it remains the world's most popular international study destination, hosting hundreds of thousands of international students each year.

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The broad appeal of the US also lies in its diversity of lifestyles and settings – stretching from the sophisticated high-rises of New York City's Manhattan to the sun-drenched Californian dream. In between the two shores there's plenty more to explore: the blues legacy of Illinois, the cowboy culture of Texas, the political buzz of Washington DC and the gritty style of Pennsylvania, to name but a few, all providing unique student experiences.

If you're keen to make your own American dream a reality, read on for information about the US higher education system, applications and admission requirements, study costs and more...



Higher education in the US

More than 974,900 international students currently study in the US on bachelor's, master's and doctoral degree programs, across 50 states and one federal district, and the number is likely to exceed one million in the near future. That might sound like a lot of international students to accommodate, but this vast nation is certainly not short on space, either in terms of acres or degree-granting institutions, of which there are around 4,500.

Combining quality with quantity, the US claims an impressive 154 entrants in the **QS World University Rankings® 2016-2017** – giving it significantly more internationally ranked universities than any other nation (next closest is the UK, with 71). The ranking is topped by the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)**, and four more US universities make the global top 10, while a total of 62 are featured in the top 300.



Public versus private

There are two main types of higher education institution in the US: private universities and public universities. While many of the best-known US universities – including the eight prestigious 'Ivy League' institutions – are private, there are also plenty of high-performing public universities, such as the **University of Los Angeles, California (UCLA)** and the **University of Michigan**. In practice, the experience (and cost) of studying in either the public or private sector is likely to be similar.



The sheer range of programs available and the thousands of funding opportunities for excellent candidates are two of the main reasons for the popularity of study in the US.

The academic year in the US is usually split into two semesters, with the fall (autumn) semester beginning in mid to late August and ending in December, while the spring term runs from January to May. Depending on where you're from, you might find the **academic terminology** slightly different to what you're used to.

It is estimated that around 4% of the overall US student population are internationals, and at graduate level this percentage rises to as much as 15%. The sheer range of programs available and the thousands of funding opportunities for excellent candidates are two of the main reasons for the popularity of study in the US. Many students are also attracted by leading research in their fields, world-class teaching and facilities, the opportunity to internationalize their CVs, the flexibility to conduct personal research projects, and of course the prospect of being immersed in American college life.

Admission requirements & applications

To start your application to study in the US, you will need to apply directly to each of the universities you're interested in. Remember that athletic recruitment and sports scholarships follow a slightly different timeline to regular applications, so it's worth checking the application deadlines early (1-1 ½ years before enrolment) to avoid missing out.

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If you are accepted you'll be entered into an international student database called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), and sent a copy of the information stored on this, which you will need to check for accuracy.

It's important to ensure that you pay the application fee (the SEVIS I-901 fee) for this database service, which will be US\$200. A few universities also allow international students to apply for free online. The university will then provide you with a Form I-20 to present to the US embassy when you attend your visa interview.

Applying for undergraduate studies

Entry requirements for each university are different, but most involve completing an admissions test or essay, the SAT or ACT admissions tests, and providing





recommendation letters from teachers. Most universities also ask for a transcript of your grades and a personal statement. The latter is a chance to set out your aspirations and demonstrate your suitability for the program of study in question, and can be a valuable way to set yourself apart from other applicants.

Applying for postgraduate studies

To be eligible for graduate study in the US, you should have completed a bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification from an internationally recognized institution. Along with your bachelor degree certificate, you will also probably be asked to provide one or more letters of recommendation, and a personal statement or application essay. You may also be asked to submit graduate admissions test results (e.g. GRE/GMAT), and for PhD applications, a research proposal.

Language requirements

For both undergraduate and postgraduate studies you will need to provide proof of your English language proficiency if English is not your first language. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is the most common test considered by US universities, while the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is also commonly accepted. It's always wise to check which tests are accepted by your chosen institutions before signing up to take the exams.



Student visas

To study in the US, international students will need to obtain a student visa.

While the process of applying for a visa can be daunting or confusing at first, there are thousands of visas successfully issued every year to incoming international students. You can find exact advice on the visa application process and expected wait time by checking your home country's US embassy website, which can be found [here](#).

The step-by-step process for securing a US student visa is as follows:

1. Apply to and be accepted by a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP)-approved school in the US.

Once you've been accepted, you're ready to apply for your visa – make sure to allow at least six months for it to be issued before your studies commence! You'll most likely need the F-1 Visa, appropriate for university students at bachelor's, master's and PhD level. Other student visa types are M-1 (for non-academic or vocational study or training in the US) and J-1, for students on exchange programs.

Your university will enroll you in the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and you will be sent a SEVIS-generated document called Form I-20 if you are eligible for an F or M visa, or Form DS-2019 if you are eligible for a J visa.

2. Pay the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee

This fee is currently US\$200 for F-1 and M-1 applicants and \$180 for J-1 applicants. It needs to be paid at least three days before submitting your visa application.

3. Complete a US student visa application along with recent photo(s)

Next you'll need to complete the [online visa application](#) form DS-160, providing the following personal details:

- Name and date of birth
- Address and phone number
- Passport details
- Details of travel plans and travel companions
- Details of previous US travel



- Your point of contact in the US
- Family, work and education details
- Security, background and medical health information
- SEVIS ID and address of US school/program you intend to enroll in (as printed on I-20 or DS-2019 form)
- A recent photograph of yourself that follows the **requirements**

Take care to answer all the questions accurately and fully as you may have to reschedule your visa interview appointment if you make any errors. If you get confused when filling in the application form you may find answers to your questions on the travel.state.gov website.

4. Pay the visa application fee

You now need to pay the non-refundable, non-transferrable Machine Readable Visa Fee, or 'MRV' fee of US\$160 – your embassy will let you know where you should pay this.

5. Schedule and attend a visa interview.

The next step is to schedule and attend an interview at your local US embassy. You can check with your embassy to find out what you'll need to bring, but generally the documents required are:

- Passport valid for at least six months beyond your period of stay in the US
- Signed SEVIS Form I-20 or DS-2019 (including individual forms for spouse/children)
- Form DS-7002 (for J-1 Trainee and Intern visa applicants only)
- SEVIS fee receipt
- DS-160 application confirmation page with barcode and application ID number
- MRV fee payment confirmation receipt
- Printed copy of visa interview appointment letter

- Two photographs in the format explained in the photograph requirements, printed on photo-quality paper

You do not need to prove that you can speak English to gain your visa, although this is a requirement for university applications.

Attending your visa interview

As with any interview, be on time and dress formally. The consular officer at your visa interview will make the decision about whether to issue a visa. The officer will ask questions relating to your ties to your home country, financial plan, English language skills, choice of university and the academic and professional goals you have for studying in the United States, so be prepared to explain these calmly, truthfully and unambiguously. You'll usually also be asked to provide your fingerprints, through an ink-free digital scan.

After you've received your visa

You can receive your visa a maximum of 120 days before your course's start date, but can't actually enter the US until 30 days before your course starts unless you have a visitor visa. It's important to note that gaining a visa does not guarantee you'll be admitted into the US; it allows you to travel to a US port of entry to request permission to enter the country. On the plane, you'll need to fill in a Customs Declaration form (CF-6059). Don't forget to bring your important documents – including your passport (of course), your SEVIS form, proof of financial resources, and evidence of student status.



Tuition fees, living costs & funding

The one fly in the ointment of US education is that tuition fees are not cheap. Private US universities often have just one rate which applies to all students, regardless of nationality. At public institutions, international students and out-of-state residents should expect to pay more than in-state students (students who are US nationals and residents of the state where the university is based).

HSBC estimates the average yearly cost of university fees in the US is \$33,215. Fees towards the lower end of the spectrum are most likely to be found among public institutions, within state university systems. College Board reports that annual tuition fees at state colleges for 2016-17 average \$9,650 for state residents and \$24,930 for everyone else. This compares to an average cost of \$33,480 at private non-profit colleges. The cheapest options of all are two year community colleges, where average fees for 2016-17 are just \$3,520. However, these institutions usually only offer associate's degrees – you would need to go elsewhere to complete a full bachelor's degree, master's or PhD.

All US universities are now legally required to include a fees and financial aid calculator on their websites, allowing students to get a rough idea of how much their intended course of study would cost, and what aid they may be eligible for. These "net price calculators" can be accessed via the government's College Affordability and Transparency Center, which also provides details of the US universities with the highest and lowest tuition fees and net costs.

Living costs

Depending on where you decide to study, the cost of living in the US can vary considerably. Believe it or not, living costs in the US are typically lower than those seen in some other popular study destinations, with New York University giving an annual average estimate of \$24,000. Iconic destinations such as New York City and San Francisco will be particularly expensive, but you might find them worth the high price tag for the culture and lifestyle. Suburban and rural areas in the South and Midwest generally have the lowest cost of living, with big cities bringing considerably higher expenses regardless of which state they're in. To cover living costs, international students are often able to seek work on campus, but work off-campus is restricted by visa regulations.



Scholarships to study in the US

The good news is that many of those who study in the US do so with some form of financial aid, and it's often the most competitive and prestigious institutions that offer the most generous support. At Harvard, for example, approximately 70% of students receive help with their fees, while at MIT, 91% of undergraduates receive some form of financial aid.

As US government aid schemes and loans are often off-limits to internationals, financial aid and scholarship programs offered by your chosen school and/or other external organizations are your best bets.

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While the most generous funding packages are often found at the top end of the private sector, many public universities offer alternative support. An example is the Curricular Practical Training (CPT) scheme, which allows students with F-1 visas to gain paid, off-campus internships to support their studies. Further external funding options include the Fulbright Foreign Student Program, a funding initiative led by the US Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.



Need-blind admission

Five major US universities offer entirely “need-blind” admission for both domestic and international students. This means they pledge to offer sufficient financial assistance for all students who are selected for admission, regardless of their financial situation. These five universities are Harvard, Amherst, Yale, Princeton and MIT. Please note that this does not mean your tuition fees will be fully paid, as you will still be expected to make a reasonable financial contribution.



NEW YORK CITY

As well as 'The Big Apple' and 'The City That Never Sleeps', New York City is sometimes called the 'Capital of the World'. Few other cities conjure up as many instant associations, be it the skyscrapers that serve as towering monuments to the city's financial power, the legendary music and fashion scenes, the bright lights and glitz of Broadway or something else altogether. Everyone has their own ideas about NYC, whether they've personally experienced it or not.

There is no shortage of top universities in New York, including **Columbia University** (ranked 20th in the QS World University Rankings® 2016-2017) and **New York University** (joint 46th).

BOSTON

If you want to be surrounded by the world's best and brightest students and academics, then you can't really do much better than Boston – especially if you include the nearby student-centered town of Cambridge, MA. This is the location of the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** and **Harvard University**, ranked first and third in the world in the 2016-2017 rankings. Other top universities in Boston include **Boston University** (89th), **Tufts University** (238th), **Boston College** (joint 299th), **Northeastern University** (joint 361st) and **Brandeis University** (401-410).

The Boston area is well known for arts and culture, particularly when it comes to contemporary classical music. It's not all serious academia and highbrow culture though: the city is also renowned for its pubs and bars, and its fondness for sports.

CHICAGO

In terms of wealth, population and cultural impact, Chicago only lags behind the behemoths that are New York City and Los Angeles. From a distance, it may appear to be a sterile mass of imposing skyscrapers, but underneath all that glass, metal and concrete is a living breathing city, known for its lively mixture of cultures, its vibrant live music and nightlife scenes, and its thriving intellectual life.

High-ranking universities in Chicago include the **University of Chicago** (10th in the QS World University Rankings 2016-2017) and – just outside the city – **Northwestern University** (26th). Other strong options are the **University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** (66th), the **University of Illinois, Chicago** (joint 187th), and **Illinois Institute of Technology** (401-410).

SAN FRANCISCO & THE BAY AREA

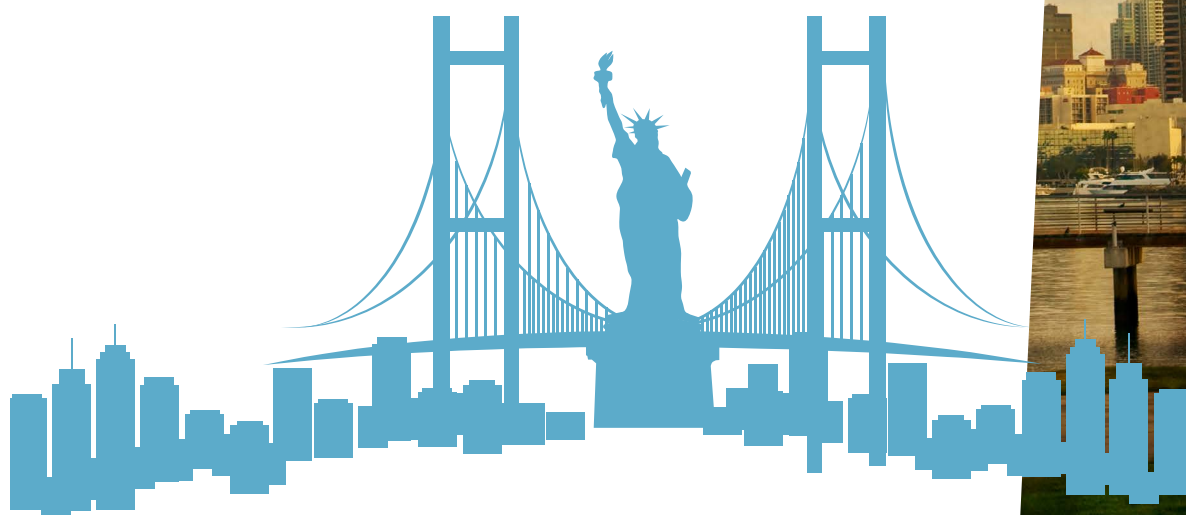
Universities in San Francisco and the Bay Area which surrounds it include two of the world's most prestigious and best-known: **Stanford University** and the **University of California, Berkeley** are ranked 2nd and 28th respectively in the QS World University Rankings 2016-2017. The intellectual might of this pair has massively contributed to the area's wealth, which is largely founded on the renowned technology hub known as Silicon Valley.

San Francisco itself, and the branch of the University of California which shares its name, is also known for its ground-breaking biomedical research. Add mild weather, a liberal outlook and a solid party culture, and you can see the appeal for yourself.

LOS ANGELES

Often called 'The Creative Capital of the World', Los Angeles will forever be primarily defined by the creative industries on which its economy is founded: music, television, and – most of all – film. Other things that might leap to mind when you think of the city are the bright Californian sun, beaches, and the perpetual pursuit of the body beautiful – after all, this is the home of "Muscle Beach".

If you'd rather be exercising your mind than your body, there are plenty of prestigious universities in Los Angeles, including the **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)**, 31st in the QS World University Rankings 2016-2017. Worth a look if you want to combine studies with star-spotting!



Working in the US after graduation

A giant in the manufacturing, technology, healthcare, energy and aerospace industries, the US continues to be a significant global exporter of electronics, machinery, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, air- and spacecraft and oil. For graduates, this means great opportunities not only to get hired, but also to be at the forefront of global innovation within your field.

Your chosen career path may also affect whereabouts you choose to stay after your studies. If you're keen to be at the heart of the IT and tech sectors, you'll no doubt have an eye on California's 'Silicon Valley', located in the San Francisco Bay Area – where juggernauts such as Facebook and Google famously flourished. Media and arts graduates, meanwhile, may gravitate towards the stage lights of Broadway or the star-paved streets of Hollywood, while hopeful politicians may be drawn to political center DC. Those with a focus on financial services may also be convinced by DC's strong economy, or else head for the bright lights and world-class financial districts of cities such as New York, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco.

After graduation, F-1 visa holders are generally entitled to stay in the country for up to one year of post-graduation practical training. In order to do this you'll need to apply for a change in visa status within 60 days after graduation, or risk being deported. There are two types of practical training – optional (OPT) and curricular (CPT). Both can be completed either during your degree or after graduation, but must not exceed 12 months and must be in a role directly related to your field of study. Some lucky STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) students may also be eligible to extend their practical training period by an additional 24 months.

There are a number of schemes for students, graduates and professionals to help make the transition into employment easier. The Fulbright Commission, for instance, offers short-term work opportunities for internationals, including internships and trainee programs lasting up to one year. Volunteer work may also boost your graduate profile, with providers such as BUNAC, Real Gap and Gap 360 providing work experience on ranches, national parks, construction sites, summer camps and more.



More information

For more information about studying in the US, join the [QS World Grad School Tour](#) in a city near you. This is a chance to meet representatives of universities from around the world, and get personal answers to all your questions.