



Graduate studies in the U.S. can be intensive, involving coursework with a thesis or a non-thesis option. It is often quite specialized with some research component to it. The learning experience is self-directed and interactive between faculty and students and among students themselves.

**Duration:** A Master's degree can vary from a typical 2-year program to an intensive 1-year program while some could extend to 3 years of study. A doctoral degree could take anywhere from 3 to 5 or even more years of study.

**There are two types of Master's degrees: academic and professional:** In an academic Master's program, there is strong emphasis on original research, research methodology and field work. In most cases, the degree leads to a Ph.D unless the department offers a terminal Master's degree. A professional degree often does not lead to a Ph.D and ends up with a terminal master's program (for example, an MBA or MFA). Such programs emphasize the application of knowledge rather than research. A doctoral degree involves advanced coursework; dissertation research and writing constitute the core of such a program.

**Academic year:** The academic year in the U.S. lasts for **nine months** beginning in late August or early September and is divided into two, three or four terms called semesters, trimesters or quarters, respectively. The most common method of measuring your academic performance is the Grade Point Average (GPA) which is scored on a 4 or a 5-point scale. Grades are awarded on a scale of "A" through "D" with "F" denoting a failing grade. An average "B" is usually the minimum required for the completion of a graduate degree. The normal course load for a graduate student is three to four courses per semester, which is generally equivalent to 9 or 12 credits per term.

### Doctoral Degree:

The doctoral degree is designed to train research scholars and, in many cases, future college and university faculty members. Receipt of a doctoral degree certifies that the student has demonstrated capacity as a trained research scholar in a specific discipline. At the doctoral level, the Ph.D (Doctor of Philosophy) is the most common degree awarded in academic disciplines. Doctoral programs involve advanced coursework, graduate seminars, and the writing of a dissertation that describes the student's own original research, completed under the supervision of a faculty adviser. Earning a doctoral degree can take anywhere from 5 to 8 years beyond the Bachelor's degree, depending on the field of study. Financial aid for a Ph.D is usually available to students in the form of a Teaching Assistantship (TA), Graduate Assistantship (GA), and/or a Research Assistantships (RA).

### ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

Unlike most countries, there is no Ministry of Education in the United States which dictates the requirements of U.S. colleges and universities. However, the U.S. Department of Education

ope.ed.gov/accreditation and the **Council for Higher Education and Accreditation (CHEA)** ([www.chea.org](http://www.chea.org)) reviews and recognizes accrediting agencies, which assure certain established standards of educational institutions and their programs. Each institution in the United States is autonomous and therefore sets its own admission standards resulting in varied admission requirements. Admission requirements for graduate studies generally involve following a careful examination of the academic history (generally the last 4 years of formal education), and performance on standardized entrance examinations (GRE/GMAT).

- Students must also demonstrate a strong command over the English language due to the complex nature of reading assignments, oral presentations, and writing work involved. Additionally, every student applying to graduate schools in the U.S. is required to submit the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) test scores.
- Supplementary documentation demonstrating commitment and motivation in your field of interest activities enhance your chances of successful admissions.
- Professional programs, in most cases, will require you to have work experience or clinical training or fieldwork as an additional admissions requirement.

### COSTS

Higher education costs in the United States are high. **Total costs could range anywhere from \$ 18,000 to over \$ 50,000 per academic year.** State colleges and universities are often, but not always, cheaper than private institutions. In addition to tuition, expenses for books and supplies, food, housing, medical treatment and health insurance, summer and vacation living costs and other miscellaneous costs could substantially raise the financial requirements for academic study in the U.S. You need to submit documentation to prove adequate financial support towards your academic program.

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

- **Selection of U.S. colleges/universities:** Ideally, you should start the pre-application process about **14-18 months before you plan to begin your studies in the U.S.** It is advisable to select as many as 20-30 schools to write to or email at first, although your final shortlist could be anywhere from 8 to 10 or more schools. Several factors should be taken into consideration while selecting universities. A comparison chart listing the differences among departments of universities with respect to field of study, area of research quality and areas of faculty interest, the thrust of the program, accreditation, student requirements, selectivity or level of competitiveness, costs, financial aid possibilities, geographic locations etc. will help you to shortlist your choice of university. Since not all factors are equally important, each student should list his or her priorities at the time of shortlisting graduate programs.

- Your **pre-application request** could be in the form of an email describing your undergraduate educational background, degree and the program you intend to pursue in the U.S. (state the academic year you intend to enroll in - the year and the session), and proof of financial support (specify if you need financial assistance). Your request should be addressed to the appropriate official as mentioned on the website pertaining to international graduate admissions.

- **Register for standardized admission tests:** it is best to take the required standardized tests by **October or November of the year before the Fall semester**. If you are applying for the Spring semester, take the tests before June of the previous year.

- **Complete and send in application forms:** You can either use the on-line applications or those that are mailed by colleges/universities. Read the website carefully at the time of accessing online application forms. Almost all U.S. institutions charge a non-refundable application fee of about \$50 to \$100. **Application deadlines vary with competitive/selective institutions usually having early deadlines.** Others vary from January to March and beyond. Some schools have rolling admissions with no fixed deadlines. Generally speaking, **all parts of your application should have reached the college/university before the deadline as applications are processed on a first-come, first-served basis.**

- You need to submit official records of your academic work called transcripts. Besides mark sheets, foreign students should ask their school to **provide a list of the subjects** they studied each year for their last four years of study along with the duration of the program. Detailed break-ups, if available, indicating the number of times the class met per semester should be included with the examination results. Ensure that official copies are procured from your academic institution in a sealed envelope. USIEF also attests academic documents for a fee.

- Most colleges and universities include a Declaration and Certification of Finances form in their application packets. This must be signed by your parents, or whoever is meeting your college/university expenses, and must be supported by a bank letter signed by the manager.

Most graduate institutions require a **Statement of Purpose essay** which is a narrative about your interests and academic goals. This may be about a page or two long, describing your background and achievements and further plans. This provides

you the opportunity to communicate positive factors to offset any weaknesses and discuss your areas of interest and any educational or career goals. Some colleges or universities specify essay topics

- Institutions generally ask for **two to three letters of recommendation**. A member of the faculty, head of the department, a project guide or your supervisor at work, may write these.

- Send supplementary materials as appropriate.

- **Financial aid:** Graduate financial aid is given on the basis of **academic ability and merit**. It is intended to supplement the amount provided by the student's family and other sources. Students and their families will be expected to provide detailed information regarding their finances. Students with a greater chance of obtaining financial assistance must therefore demonstrate: high academic achievement, high scores on standardized tests, exceptional talent or a record of meaningful involvement in co-curricular activities relating to the intended field of study, Individualized letters of recommendation enumerating his or her abilities, or strong professional background (if required as part of the admissions requirement) will help.

- Finally, keep in mind that your application will be reviewed with respect to several strong applications received from all over the world. Everyone cannot be given admission. All colleges and universities have a set of institutional values and needs impacting admissions decisions each year. The process of getting into an American university or a college involves several factors, indicators and characteristics about you as an individual weighed against the goals and priorities set by each school and its respective departments. So, **find the right match** by selecting a university or a college well suited to your own needs and **work hard** on your applications.

**When you receive a letter of acceptance**, you are required to confirm your admission. A simple email confirming your acceptance should be fine. Some schools may require a deposit to confirm your admission. The International Student Office will later send you the **I-20 (Certificate of Eligibility)**, which is required for you to apply for an F-1 visa at a US Embassy.

**Visa:** In order to enter the United States, **you should apply for a student visa (F-1)**. For details on F-1 visa requirements, please visit the website: [www.usembassy.state.gov/newdelhi](http://www.usembassy.state.gov/newdelhi) and also attend the F-1 visa seminars organized by USIEF.

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