Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs
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If You Want to Study in the United States: Short-Term Study

IF YOU WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

BOOK 3

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

education USA

IF YOU WANT TO STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

Booklet 3

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

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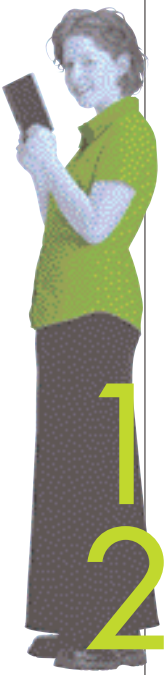
PREFACE



Short-Term Study, English Language Programs, Distance Education, and Accreditation is one of a series of four introductory booklets published 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. All four booklets may be downloaded from the World Wide Web at http://educationusa.state.gov, and print copies are available from U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide (see pages 11–12 for more information about these centers).

The four booklets cover the following areas:

1 *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.

2 *Graduate and Professional Study and Research* — how to research and apply to U.S. master's and 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.

3 *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 towards 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.

4 *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 invaluable advice on applying for a visa, moving to the United States, and what to expect when you arrive on campus.

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Why Study in the United States? 8
U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 1

Short-Term Study in the United States 12
Factors to Consider
- Planning Ahead
- Choosing a Program
- Accreditation
- Costs
- Funding
- Visas

High School Exchanges
Work Exchange and Professional Exchange Programs
Vocational and Technical Programs
Short-Term University Study
- University Exchange Programs
- Non-Degree or "Special Student" Study
- Summer Session Study
- Professional Short-Term Study
- Visiting Fellows and Scholars

Useful Web Sites

Chapter 2

English Language Programs 33
Choosing an English Language Program
- Program Types
- Standards
- Curriculum
- Length of Study
- Location and Setting
- How Classes Are Organized
- Costs
- Admission Requirements

Admission to Academic Programs
Visas
Useful Web Sites

CONTENTS

Chapter 3 **Distance Education** 44
What Is Distance Education?
Why Choose Distance Education?
Skills Needed to Succeed
Choosing a Distance Education Program
What Types of Programs Are Available?
What Type of Institutions Offer Distance Education?
How Much Does Distance Education Cost?
Distance Education Versus Correspondence Education
Admission Requirements
Other Things to Consider
Quality of the Program
Accreditation
Security of the Program
Useful Web Sites

Chapter 4 **Accreditation** 56
Maintaining Educational Standards in the United States
Why Accreditation Is Important
Recognized Accrediting Bodies
What Accreditation Signifies
What Do the Accrediting Bodies Do?
Institutional Accreditation
Regional Accreditation
National Accreditation
Regional Versus National Accreditation
Institutions Not Holding Recognized Accreditation
Programmatic Accreditation
U.S. Institutions and Programs Outside the United States
Useful Web Sites

Appendices **Bibliography** 71

Glossary of Terms 76

Index 84

This booklet gives information and advice on four specific areas:

Short-Term Study in the United States: Are you...

- ✏ interested in participating in an exchange program with the United States?
- ✏ wanting practical training in a particular field?
- ✏ needing academic or professional certification for your career?
- ✏ curious about pursuing a nonacademic program in the United States?
- ✏ looking to improve your professional qualifications?
- ✏ considering study at a U.S. university, but not for a full degree?

All of these pursuits are possible through short-term educational programs in the United States that last 12 months or less. Chapter 1 of this booklet gives an overview of the types of programs available. These include high school exchanges, work exchange programs, vocational and technical programs, certificate and professional programs, and short-term university study. This chapter also highlights some general considerations for short-term study in the United States, including the cost of programs and the visa requirements.

English Language Programs: Would you like to improve your English language skills? Chapter 2 discusses how to find and choose the most appropriate English language program for you in the United States.

Distance Education: If you are considering taking advan-

tage of this new and growing method of study to complete a diploma, certificate, or degree, chapter 3 will help you determine whether distance education is for you. It also explains what to consider when choosing from among the many programs available.

Accreditation: Chapter 4 is for anyone who has questions about the system of recognition and quality assurance for educational institutions and programs in the United States, which is known as accreditation. The last chapter of this booklet explains how the system works and why it is important to you. It looks at the implications of accreditation for recognition of any program of study you complete, and it raises the questions you need to ask about accreditation when you apply to study in the United States.

Why Study in the United States?

Here are just a few of the reasons why some 550,000[1] international students from around the world are furthering their education in the United States:

Quality: U.S. educational institutions are known worldwide for their quality programs, faculty, facilities, and resources.

Choice: The U.S. education system offers an unrivalled choice of institutions, academic and social environments, entry requirements, programs of study, and subjects in which you can specialize.

Value: As an investment in your future, studying in the United States offers excellent value for the money. A wide range of tuition fees and living costs, plus some financial help from colleges and educational organizations, has made study in the United States affordable for thousands of students before you.

U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers

"The educational advisers at the center helped me clarify many matters regarding studying in the United States and were always ready to lend a hand. I also learned a lot about the colleges and universities of my choice through the excellent resources available."

—Psychology student from Malaysia

"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 schools and programs for you and preparing successful applications will require commitment and careful planning on your part, but in almost every country there are specialized advisers who understand your needs and can help you. Information and advice on study in the United States is available to you from a network of over 450 U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide. All centers can provide you with directories, guides, college catalogs, and short-course information on study in the United States, as well as trained educational advisers who want to help you and your family with the process of choosing and applying to U.S. schools, colleges, and universities. Some centers also run events such as college fairs or seminars. Introductory information in the form of video or group presentations, Web site access, and independent resource libraries is available free of charge from information and advising centers, but payment may be required at some centers for additional services.

All U.S. educational information and 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 organ-

izations 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 U.S. Department of State's Web site at http://educationusa.state.gov.

Good luck with your applications!

Useful Web Sites

On-line Version of the *If You Want to Study in the United States* Booklet Series
http://educationusa.state.gov

Directory of U.S. Educational Information and Advising Centers Worldwide
http://educationusa.state.gov

[1] *Open Doors 2001: Open Doors on the Web*, http://www.opendoorsweb.org/. Institute of International Education, New York, N.Y.

SHORT-TERM STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

The United States offers a wide range of short-term study programs lasting 12 months or less, including high school exchange programs, work and professional exchange programs, vocational and technical programs, short-term university study, and professional study. This chapter gives an overview of some things you need to think about when applying to any short-term study program in the United States. The chapter also presents the main program options that are available.

Factors to Consider

Planning Ahead

Doing your "homework" is the best way to succeed in any educational program. Your relatively short time of study in the United States will be enhanced by careful planning and advance preparation. Twelve to 18 months prior to the date you wish to begin a program, define your goals and begin researching programs that will best meet them.

Choosing a Program

Begin your search by visiting your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center. There you will have access to a variety of reference materials about U.S. educational programs and institutions. You can also find information through the Web sites listed at the end of this chapter and the books listed in the bibliography at the end of this booklet.

Try to identify several programs of study that will meet

your personal and professional requirements. Then, contact the organizations or institutions running the programs and request detailed information. Be sure to communicate your particular situation and any special needs you may have.

Compare the programs that interest you by considering:

- application deadlines;
- whether you meet the eligibility and admission requirements;
- accreditation of the program or institution (see the section below and chapter 4 in this booklet);
- costs (see the section below);
- whether the program includes or arranges for housing, or if it provides any assistance to students who are looking for a place to live;
- other services, such as social activities, provided by the organization running the program or by the host educational institution;
- how long the program has been in existence, typical participants, and, if applicable, what careers or jobs past participants have gained entry to after completing the program;
- if this is not an international exchange program, how experienced the program administrators are in dealing with participants from outside the United States;
- the location and local environment, including climate and availability of public transportation;
- the "small print": whether a deposit is required in advance, refund and cancellation policies, and any other obligations on both you and the organization running the program.

If you are considering studying at a college or university, you may also 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

There is no central government body in the United States that is in charge of monitoring educational standards. Instead, the United States relies on the system of accreditation to ensure educational quality of institutions and specific programs. It is essential to make sure that any courses or short-term study or training programs you choose are properly accredited. Also check in advance with your home-country secondary school, university, ministry of education or labor, employer, or relevant professional association to determine whether your program of study will be recognized upon your return.

For more detailed information concerning this very important part of choosing an appropriate short-term study program, please read chapter 4 in this booklet, "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 in order to complete the program. Information about the costs of each program is available in program brochures, catalogs, and application materials, and sometimes on a program Web site.

You will also need to budget for the cost of traveling to and from the United States, as well as for living expenses such as room and board. In addition, you will need to have health insurance while in the United States. There may also be a charge in your country for applying for a U.S. student visa.

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. Where funding may be available, it is highlighted in the sections below.

Visas

It is important to note that almost all types of short-term study in the United States require you to apply for a student visa from the U.S. embassy or consulate in your home country, regardless of the length of the course or the type of program. The most common visa for international students is the F-1 student visa. Vocational students travel on an M-1 visa. If you are participating in an established educational exchange program, you may need to apply for the J-1 exchange visitor visa instead. Confirm with the staff at the institution running the program which type of visa you will need.

Before applying for an F-1, J-1, a M-1 visa, you must receive a U.S. government form called a Certificate of Eligibility. If you are applying for an F-1 or M-1 visa, the Certificate of Eligibility will be issued by your U.S. institution of study. If you are applying for a J-1 visa, the Certificate of Eligibility will be issued either by your U.S. institution of study or by the program that is sponsoring your study in the United States. The Certificate of Eligibility shows that you have been accepted into a program of study and have proven that you have sufficient funds to pay all expenses for the duration of the course or program, either through your own funds or through funds from a sponsoring individual or organization. For an F-1 visa application, the Certificate of Eligibility is called the Form I-20 A-B; for an M-1 visa, it is called I-20 M-N; and for a J-1 visa, it is Form DS-2019.

For more information on visa requirements and regulations, see Booklet Four in this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*. Also contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center and your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate to find out specific visa application procedures and visa costs for your country.

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.

Exchange programs for high school students range in length from a few weeks to a semester or an academic year. Many include a "home stay" in which the student lives with a host family for the duration of the program. Students who participate in these exchanges are generally self-funded, and scholarships are rare. However, there are a few well-established international organizations, such as Rotary International, the American Field Service (AFS), and the Lions Club, that offer exchange programs that are partially or fully funded. If these organizations have a presence in your home country, contact them directly to see what programs are available.

Another 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. U.S. educational information and advising centers are likely to have contact information for all the state departments of education. Information on private schools in the United States can also be found at information and advising centers or by doing Internet searches.

Note that unless you plan to live with relatives or to be part of an organized program, you will be responsible for arranging your own accommodations in the United States. In addition, while public high schools are free to U.S. taxpayers, you will be required to pay tuition. 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. If you are attending a U.S. public high school, you must show proof of having paid the unsubsidized cost of your educational expenses before an F-1 visa will be issued. The maximum length of time that you can attend a U.S. public high school is one year. If you attend a private high school in the United States, however, there is no time limitation and no prepayment requirement.

English language proficiency is usually a requirement for any U.S. high school exchange program. You may be asked to present a letter of support or evaluation of your English language ability from a teacher or other qualified individual, or to go through an interview in English with a local representative of the exchange program.

The U.S. educational information or advising center near you may have a list or directory of high school exchange programs between your country and the United States. In addition, some useful organizations in the United States to contact are:

American Institute for Foreign Study Foundation (AIFS)
River Plaza
9 West Broad Street
Stamford, CT 06902-3788, USA
Telephone: 203-399-5000 or 800-727-2437; Fax: 203-399-5588
Web site: http://www.aifs.com

AYUSA International
455 Market Street , 17th floor
Stamford, CT 06902-3788 USA
Telephone: 888-552-9872; Fax: 415-986-4620
Web site: http://www.ayusa.org/

EF Foundation for Foreign Study
EF Center Boston
One Education Street
Cambridge, MA 02141, USA
Telephone: 617-619-1000; Fax: 617-619-1001
Web site:http://www.effoundation.org/

The Center for Cultural Interchange (CCI)
17 North Second Avenue
St. Charles, IL 60174, USA
Telephone: 630-377-2272; Fax: 630-377-2307
Web site: http://www.cci-exchange.com/

It is also a good idea to explore the World Wide Web, using various search engines, for the latest information on these and other high school exchange programs.

Work Exchange and Professional Exchange Programs

Work exchange programs encourage international understanding through short-term work experience in the United States. These programs vary widely in nature; for example, some programs allow you to accept any type of work that is offered, while others restrict you to working in a job related to your chosen career, or even to doing a specific job, such as being an au pair. Each program has different eligibility requirements, and you should check to see which programs best suit your particular situation and needs.

Work exchange programs do not operate between the United States and every country. Contact a U.S. educa-

tional information or advising center to find out if any programs are available to citizens of your country. Also use the Internet to search for information on work exchange programs.

These programs can be administered only by organizations that have been authorized by the U.S. Department of State to issue the Certificate of Eligibility (Form DS-2019). This form allows work exchange program participants to apply for a J-1 exchange visitor visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate. The J-1 visa allows the participant to work legally in the United States for a specified period of time. This type of J-1 visa should not be confused with another category of J-1 visa that is issued to students enrolled in degree or exchange programs at U.S. universities (see Booklets One and Two of this series for further information on degree-level study in the United States); you will not be able to study full-time while you are on a work exchange program. Further information on the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program and the AuPair Program is available on the Web site http://exchanges.state.gov.

You should plan your participation in a work exchange program as far in advance as possible. Some work exchange programs require that you obtain an offer of employment in the United States before you apply to the 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 work exchange organization how long the whole process will take. Allow time to apply for and obtain your visa, and, if possible, do not purchase a plane ticket before you are informed that your visa application has been successful.

If you are interested in learning more about your particular profession in the United States, you might want to consider taking part in a professional exchange program. A number of programs operate between the United

States and other countries that allow members of certain professions, most commonly teachers, to experience living and working at that profession in the other country. An example of such programs is the Fulbright Teacher and Administrator Exchange Program, which operates between the United States and more than 30 countries. Further information on this program is available on the World Wide Web at http://exchanges.state.gov/education/fulbright. Contact a U.S. educational information or advising center for information on this and other professional exchange programs available between your country and the United States.

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, and are intended 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 may be found not only at community and junior colleges, but also at some four-year colleges and universities. Please read 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. Most of all, it is important to verify that the college you are considering holds the appropriate type of accreditation. Accreditation is the system of recognition and quality assurance of educational institutions and programs in the United States. 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.

Before you apply to a technical or vocational training program, find out as much information about it as possible. See the section "Factors to Consider" at the beginning of this chapter for further guidance on choosing a program. It is also wise to make sure that there are opportunities for employment in your country in the career that you are considering.

Many U.S. educational information and advising centers have information on technical and vocational education programs. In addition, further resources can be found at the end of this chapter under "Useful Web Sites" and in the bibliography at the end of this booklet.

Short-Term University Study

Would you like to study at a U.S. university, but you cannot commit to study for a full degree in the United States? University exchange programs, non-degree or "special student" study, and summer session 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. This study might be part of your degree program in your home country, or you might take just a few courses at a U.S. university – at the undergraduate or graduate level – for your personal or professional enrichment.

University Exchange Programs

Many U.S. universities have formal links with universities outside the United States, and they have set up student exchange programs with these universities. Under such programs, U.S. students and students from another country trade places and experience living in each other's countries and studying at each other's universities. Usually, the courses studied count toward the student's degree program in his or her home country. Most of these programs run for 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. Or, 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. Also, many U.S. universities list their exchange programs on their Web sites.

You may be able to apply for funding for an undergraduate exchange program from your home university or institute, even if study abroad is not a requirement for

your program of study. Funding from U.S. institutions for short-term study of this kind 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 like Rotary International; from multinational companies; or from local businesses.

Non-Degree or "Special Student" Study

If you have completed secondary school or an undergraduate degree or if you are in the process of studying toward an undergraduate or graduate degree, many U.S. universities will allow you to take degree-level courses without enrolling for a full degree program. Under this arrangement, you may be able to take classes in a specific department, in several departments throughout a university, or, possibly, at several universities in a local area.

Non-degree students who take degree-level classes may be called special students. Many universities impose a specific 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' catalogs. For specific information and application procedures for schools and programs that interest you, contact university admissions offices directly as well as the individual departments concerned, explaining that you wish to do short-term, degree-level 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 can be found at U.S. educational information and advising centers, your local university's study abroad office or career placement center, or public libraries that have funding directories such as *Funding for United States Study* and *The Grants Register.* See the bibliography at the end of this booklet for a listing of these and other useful publications.

Summer Session Study

Some universities in the United States offer classes during the summer break between May and August. The school may offer one or two "summer sessions," and each session usually lasts between six and ten weeks.

Many universities open summer session classes to the outside public, and they sometimes make available on-campus dormitory accommodations. You may find that students who are enrolled in a degree program at the university also take classes during the summer in order to finish their degree faster than usual or to catch up on classes they missed or in which they want to improve their grades. This is a great way for you to experience living and studying at a university in the United States while improving your knowledge and skills in a specific subject area.

Universities and colleges may offer you the option to take classes for "credit" or to "audit" classes without earning credits.

If you take classes for credit, each subject you study will be worth a certain number of units or credits. You may choose to receive an official transcript at the end of the session, which will state the classes you took, how many credits they were worth, and what grades you achieved.

Some international students who attend summer sessions are able to use the credits they earn in the United States toward their degree completion at home; you should ask your department and university officials if they will allow you to do this before you enroll. Likewise, if at some point later in your studies you decide to enroll in a full degree program at a U.S. university, you may be able to use the credits earned during your summer session study as credit toward your degree program. This is decided on a case-by-case basis, and you will need to ask the university admissions office which courses they will recognize and how much credit they will grant.

If you choose to audit courses, you will attend the class meetings and usually will be expected to complete all assignments and examinations, but no grades or credits will be awarded at the end of the session. Audited classes usually cost less than regular classes. To avoid any potential misunderstandings, be sure to verify requirements and program costs for classes you wish to audit with the admissions office of the U.S. institution before enrolling.

Universities usually place certain restrictions on students attending summer session classes. For example, some 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. You should check directly with the school's summer session brochure or Web site for eligibility requirements and application procedures.

Many U.S. educational information and advising centers have information on summer session programs at U.S. universities and colleges. Also consult the listing of useful Web sites at the end of this chapter and the bibliography at the end of this booklet for additional references.

Note that summer schools and institutes offer another way to study in the United States during the summer months. While summer sessions at U.S. universities offer degree-level courses, summer schools and similar programs offer a broad range of courses structured for personal enrichment and professional development. Such programs can be found at certain English language centers (see chapter 2 in this booklet), as well as at institutes offering classes in cooking, diving, fashion, music, the arts, and other topics.

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 even specifically designed to meet the needs of professionals from outside the United States. Institutions that offer such programs include departments within U.S. universities and colleges, as well as public and private training organizations. These programs do not lead to a degree, but they do provide you with professional knowledge and help to improve your professional skills, and many award a certificate to show that you have completed 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. The 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. Also, individuals in short-term training programs are away from work and home for a shorter period of time than if they were enrolled in a traditional academic program. Because of the short duration and the relatively high cost of these programs, it is extremely important to identify the program that best meets your specific educational needs and circumstances and your professional training objectives. Primary factors to consider include:

Area of Interest and Specialization: Short-term training programs are available in a wide range of areas. What is your particular interest and, within that, what is your area of specialization?

English Language Level: Although trainers try to communicate clearly and simply, to participate effectively in an intensive training program you will need to be proficient in English. If you have limited English skills, there are a few programs that are also available in other widely spoken languages such as Arabic, French, or Spanish.

Sponsorship/Financial Resources: What level of sponsorship is available from your employer or other sources? This will affect which programs are open to you.

Length of Training Required: How long can you be away from your home country? How long are you likely to need training?

Career Goals: Consider what type of work you would like to be doing in the future; this may help to define the type of training that is most suitable.

New Skills Needed: Consider the goals of the training and any new responsibilities you will be expected to assume when you return to your job at home. Then, look carefully at the course information to see whether it will meet these needs. Also look closely to see whom the

course is intended for. Some programs provide specific training geared toward learning a particular skill, while others cover broad topics such as management techniques. Some courses are designed for experienced professionals, while others are oriented toward beginners. Will you have to share your expertise on your return? If so, you might consider programs that include training and presentation skills, as this will maximize the benefit of the program to both you and your employer.

Once you have identified programs that meet your circumstances and needs, you should look at each one and ask these questions:

- ✏ How many hours per day of instruction are provided?
- ✏ What are the academic/professional backgrounds of the trainers?
- ✏ What facilities and resources are used for training?
- ✏ What kinds of support, services, and activities are provided beyond the training itself?
- ✏ What is the typical background of trainees?
- ✏ Is the program U.S. or internationally oriented?
- ✏ How flexible is the curriculum?
- ✏ How does equipment used in the training compare with what is available at home?
- ✏ What follow-up support is available?

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 for other types of short-term study. The U.S. educational information or advising center near you may have information on short-term professional training programs in the United States. Other possible sources of information and advice include your employer, professional associations, home country government agencies, or U.S. training institutions, universities, and colleges. Contact the Office of International Programming, Office of Continuing Education, or similar office at indi-

vidual colleges or universities. Searches on the Web may help identify appropriate training organizations and programs. As appropriate, you also can contact suppliers of computer or technical equipment for your field, teaching/research hospitals, or, for public service fields, U.S. government organizations and offices.

Visiting Fellows and Scholars

Opportunities exist at many U.S. universities for those who already hold a doctoral degree who wish to pursue further research. Universities also may allow visiting fellows to audit graduate-level courses (that is, take courses without receiving a grade or any credit for them), while having use of all academic facilities for personal research. General requirements for visiting fellows can be found in a university's catalog or on its Web site. For specific information and application procedures, prospective fellows should contact the university admissions office and the appropriate department directly.

Visiting fellows are expected to be self-funded or to have financial assistance from an outside source. Funding directories are available for reference at U.S. educational information and advising centers. See the bibliography at the end of this booklet for further details. In addition, 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.

Time for a Recap

✏ Begin planning any short-term study in the United States 12 to 18 months in advance, and identify several programs that meet your personal and professional requirements.

- Make sure that any short-term study 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. Both include hands-on activities to learn particular skills; technical education programs also require students to learn concepts, theories, and design.

- Vocational and technical education programs lead to certificates of completion or diplomas, not degrees. These programs last from a few days to more than a year. Before applying to a program, make sure it is properly accredited.

- 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, which allows students to take degree-level courses without enrolling for a full degree program; summer session study, which involves short-term, intensive degree-level courses; and for scholars and fellows, the opportunity to do research and audit graduate-level courses.

- Summer schools and institutes in the United States offer the chance to take courses in a variety of subject areas for the purposes of personal enrichment or general professional development.

- Intensive programs specifically designed to meet the needs of professionals, and lasting from a few days to

an academic year, are available in the United States through colleges, universities, and specialist training institutions. Because of their short-term and specialist nature, participants in such programs benefit most if they research a good match between their professional training needs and objectives and the programs available. Programs usually require good English skills.

✏ Consult the organization that is conducting or sponsoring any short-term study program, as well as a U.S. educational information or advising center, for application procedures and visa requirements. Most short-term study programs in the United States require you to obtain a student visa from the U.S. embassy or consulate in your home country.

Useful Web Sites

The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education
http://www.aaace.org

American Cultural Exchange
http://www.cultural.org

American Institute for Foreign Study
http://www.aifs.com

American Society for Training and Development
http://www.astd.org

AYUSA International
http://www.ayusa.org/

The Center for Cultural Interchange
http://www.cci-exchange.com/

EF Foundation for Foreign Study
http://www.effoundation.org/

Fulbright Teacher and Administrator Exchange Program
http://exchanges.state.gov/education/fulbright

J-1 Exchange Visitor and Au Pair Programs
http://exchanges.state.gov

North American Association of Summer Sessions
http://www.naass.org/

Occupational Outlook Handbook
http://stats.bls.gov/oco

Peterson's Summer Opportunities Channel
http://www.petersons.com/summerop/

Shaw Guides – Educational Travel and Creative Career Programs
http://www.shawguides.com/

Study Abroad
http://www.studyabroad.com

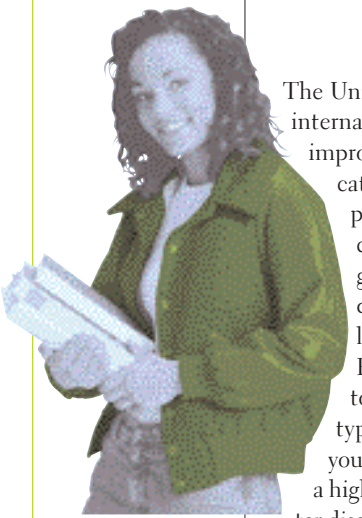
Visa Information
http://www.UnitedStatesVisas.gov

Vocational and Technical Education Online
http://dragon.ep.usm.edu/~yuen/votech.htm

Western Association of Summer Session Administrators
http://www.wassa.wsu.edu/

Yahoo! Listing of Summer Educational Programs
http://dir.yahoo.com/education/programs/summer_programs/

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS



The United States is the most popular destination for international students seeking to learn English or to improve their English skills. There are over 400 educational institutions that offer English language programs, spread across the many geographic and cultural regions of the United States. These programs provide a variety of courses, from academic English for university-bound students to language and culture courses for travelers. Because there are so many choices, you will have to make some basic decisions first, such as the type of program and the locations that interest you. You will also need to understand how to choose a high-quality English language program. This chapter discusses the factors you need to consider in determining which program is best for you, and it directs you to additional sources of information.

Choosing an English Language Program

English language programs of high quality can be found at a variety of U.S. educational institutions. High-quality programs have a professionally trained faculty, an excellent curriculum, and superior facilities for study. Such facilities may include classrooms, libraries, laboratories, computers, and other equipment. As a prospective student, you should examine the following criteria carefully and use them to help you decide whether a program is appropriate for you.

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. Courses include classroom instruction, small group discussions, language labs, and out-of-class work. Intensive courses may or may not 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. A university may require you to take a few semi-intensive English-as-a-second-language (ESL) courses if your Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores were sufficient for admission into a degree program at the university, but further proficiency is desired.

Professional English Programs: Many private English language programs and some university-based ones 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, and travel. Internships with U.S. businesses are available with some programs, both private and university-based.

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

Standards

Before you apply to a language school, you should make sure it meets accepted minimum standards. Accreditation is the process whereby standards are established and maintained for educational institutions in the United States. 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). Check to see whether the programs you are considering are accredited by either of these bodies.

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) authorizes English language programs to issue the government Form I-20, which you will need to apply for your student visa. (See the "Visas" section below for further information on the visa application process.) The INS will consider a program as an Intensive English Program only if it offers a minimum of 18 classroom hours (also called contact hours) per week for its students, and if it is accredited by a national or regional accrediting body recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. Therefore, if an Intensive English Program has approval by the INS to issue the government Form I-20, that is one indicator that the program is accredited. Further information on accreditation and recognized accrediting bodies can be found in chapter 4 of this booklet.

Two professional organizations for Intensive English Programs have established standards that all of their members' programs must meet: the Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP) and the American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP). Ask whether the programs you are considering are members of UCIEP or AAIEP.

It is also important to know the academic standing of the

faculty who will be teaching you. Look at the program's brochure, catalog, or Web site 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 in applied linguistics.

Lastly, you can ask whether the program's faculty members belong to NAFSA: Association of International Educators or to Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). NAFSA has a Code of Ethics to which members are expected to subscribe. Both NAFSA and TESOL have established standards of good practice for their members.

Curriculum

Most language programs' 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's curriculum is designed to improve the student's understanding and use of English in reading, writing, listening, and speaking; some define grammar as a distinct skill. 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) and the Test of Spoken English (TSE).

To find out more about what a particular English language program offers, check the program's Web site. If you cannot access the information you need on the World Wide Web, contact the admissions office of the IEP by e-mail, in writing, or by telephone, and request that they send you detailed information about their programs.

Length of Study

How long will it take to achieve the language skills you desire? 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 will progress quickly, while others may take longer to develop the necessary skills. It could take one or two terms/semesters, or in some cases longer, to reach the level you are aiming for. Progress from one level to the next depends on the abilities of the individual student as well as on his or her existing English language skills.

Location and Setting

The United States is a large country with a diverse range of geographic features, climates, urban environments, and cultural flavors. An important factor in your choice of a program will be where it is located. There are high-quality programs in all regions of the United States.

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 and by a department of a university or college, such as the English language department;
- ✏ privately owned (proprietary) language schools that are associated with a university or college and are on or near the campus;
- ✏ private schools that are not connected to a college or university.

IEPs in all settings provide a variety of academic and student services. It is important to find out whether a program has a connection with an academic institution,

what services are available to you, 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 institution'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 are provided – either by a university or by the language school itself – so that you can select the right program for you.

How Classes Are Organized

The way that classes are structured is another good indicator of a quality IEP. Some questions you might want to ask are:

- ✏ 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?

The class size and student-to-teacher ratio can indicate the level of personal attention that students might reasonably expect to receive. Having students from many language backgrounds, and not just your own, usually will provide a setting in which you will learn English more quickly.

Costs

A very important item to consider in choosing any program is cost. Besides tuition, programs may require payment for student fees, housing, board (meals), books, health insurance (required for anyone who is in the Unit-

ed States on a student visa), and other miscellaneous expenses. Many programs require an application fee, which is often nonrefundable. Some programs also require a tuition deposit.

It is important to find out the total cost of the program before you apply. Full payment is made after arrival at the school, so make sure you are prepared to pay all of the required costs.

Admission Requirements

Each IEP in the United States sets its own admission requirements. These vary from program to program; however, most require that you have completed secondary school, and that you provide financial information showing you can pay the full cost of the program. Some programs will ask you to provide additional information such as educational transcripts and documentation of English proficiency, and some will require that you devote the majority of your time to language studies while you are studying with them. You should be able to find all of the requirements for admission in the program's brochure or catalog or on its Web site.

Admission to Academic Programs

It is very important to remember that admission to a language program does not mean that you have also been accepted into other academic programs offered by a university or college. However, some institutions in the United States offer conditional or provisional admission to academic programs. For international students, conditional or provisional admission most often will be granted to applicants whose academic or professional qualifications are very good but whose English language skills need some improvement. That is, you might be admitted to a program of study based on your academic or professional qualifications, but before enrolling in regu-

lar courses, you will be required either to complete additional English language courses or to submit acceptable scores on standardized tests that measure English language proficiency. If this applies to you, you should carefully read the letter or other documents that you receive from the admissions office to determine exactly what the conditions of admission are, and then contact them directly if you have any questions.

Some institutions admit international students into an academic program without conditions, but require the student to take English language placement tests after they arrive on campus. Based on the results of the placement tests, students are permitted either to enroll in regular programs of study, to enroll in additional English language courses at the same time as enrolling in regular programs of study, or to enroll in and successfully complete additional English language courses before beginning regular courses.

In some schools, the additional language courses required carry credit and count toward the student's graduation requirements. In other schools, the additional language courses may be given through an Intensive English Program and carry either no credit or credit that is not counted toward graduation.

Visas

The final step in preparation for the study of English in the United States is obtaining a student visa. You will need to apply for an F-1 student visa from your local U.S. consulate or embassy.

A good-quality, INS-authorized IEP in the United States will furnish you with the information and documentation you need to apply for an F-1 student visa. The materials you receive from the school should include a U.S. government Certificate of Eligibility (Form I-20 A-B), which

you will need in order to apply for a visa. This form shows the consulate or embassy that you have been accepted by a recognized English language school and that you have proven to the school that you can pay the costs of attending its program.

Contact the U.S. consulate or embassy in your country well ahead of your intended departure date to find out about visa costs and any additional documentation that is required to apply for a student visa in your country. Also contact your nearest U.S. educational information or advising center to see if they are conducting any pre-departure orientation sessions for students who have been accepted to study in the United States. Note that there may be a charge for these programs.

Before applying for your visa, you are strongly urged to read the visa section in Booklet Four of this series, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States.*

Time for a Recap

✏ Intensive English Programs (IEPs) are offered only at accredited English language schools that provide at least 18 classroom hours of instruction each week.

✏ Courses range from beginner to advanced in level, including those designed for students who are preparing to begin studies at a U.S. university or college. The length of time needed in the program will vary depending on the student's goals and his or her English skills at the start of the program.

✏ Programs may be general or may have a specific focus, such as English for academic purposes or preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL).

- Programs may be run by a university department, by a private organization at or near a college, or by a private school unconnected to a college or university.

- Students should ask about class size, student-to-teacher ratio, and how many students with the same language are placed in one 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 a U.S. educational information or advising center for more information on visa requirements and procedures.

Useful Web Sites

Locating information on English language schools in the United States on the Internet has become relatively easy. There are three main types of Web sites for you to look at:

- English language programs' own Web sites;
- the Web sites of professional associations and accrediting bodies, which list their member programs;
- commercial sites that list language training programs. These sites include institutions that have paid fees to have their sites listed and to have their Web sites linked to the site.

Below is a selection of different types of Web sites, all with useful information on English language programs.

Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training
http://www.accet.org

American Association of Intensive English Programs
http://www.aaiep.org

Commission on English Language Program Accreditation
http://www.cea-accredit.org

Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs in the USA
http://www.uciep.org

Dave's ESL Café
http://www.eslcafe.com/

EducationConnect
http://www.educationconnect.com

Education International Worldwide
http://www.eiworldwide.com/

Institute of International Education
http://www.iiebooks.org/iiebooks/inad.html

NAFSA: Association of International Educators
http://www.nafsa.org

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
http://www.tesol.org

The Digital Education Network
http://www.edufind.com

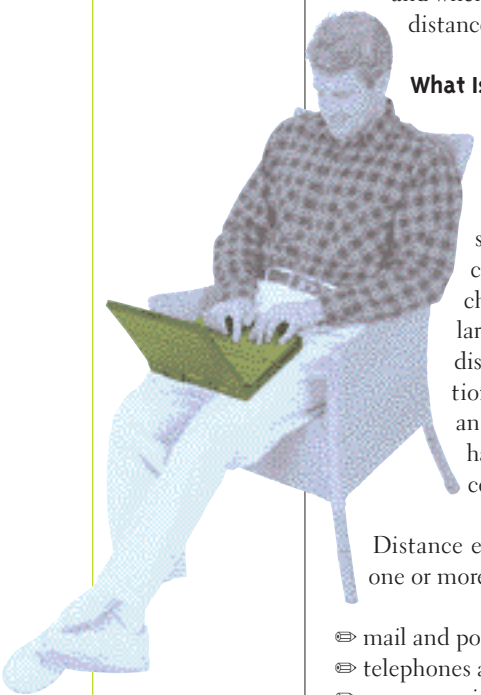
Study in the USA
http://www.studyusa.com

Study Abroad
http://www.studyabroad.com

For information on student visas, see:
http://www.UnitedStatesVisas.gov

DISTANCE EDUCATION

The 21st century brings with it a constantly expanding number of ways in which education can be effectively delivered to learners. More than 90 percent of all accredited U.S. colleges and universities that have 10,000 or more students now offer distance education programs. This chapter will provide you with the background information you need to pursue this relatively new form of study. It includes information on what distance education is, how to choose the most appropriate program for you, and where and how to locate more information on distance education programs.



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, instruction is given at a particular time and, usually, at specific locations. If distance education is asynchronous, instruction can be received by students wherever and whenever they desire, as long as they have access to the Internet or, in the case of correspondence education, to the mail.

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

- mail and post offices;
- telephones and voicemail;
- one-way or interactive radio, television, satellite, audio, or video transmission;

- video cassette recorders (VCRs) or CD-ROMs;
- electronic mail (e-mail) and the Internet (e.g., Web-based learning).

Many distance education programs also require occasional attendance by the student on the campus of the college or university offering the program.

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;
- professional: they canot get away from their current job in order to enhance their future possibilities;
- 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 students who like to work independently and who have some degree of privacy. With today's heavy reliance on computers and the Internet, certain technical skills also are required. More than a few students do not complete their distance education programs or transfer to more traditional campus-based degree programs, because they do not have the necessary skills and a suitable working environment. Potential distance learners should do an honest and thoughtful assessment of themselves in relation to the requirements for the program. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I self-motivated and an independent learner?

- ✏ Am I someone who can work consistently, or do I tend to put everything off until the last minute?
- ✏ Does my schedule truly 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 technical skills needed to participate fully in the program that interests me? If the program is conducted by computer, do I have the necessary computer skills to complete the program successfully, or do I need to learn how to use e-mail and the Internet first?
- ✏ Do I have someone to assist me if I experience technical problems? (Any distance education program accredited in the United States should be able to help you through its "help desk," which you can access through e-mail, but it is also useful to know someone close to home whom you can call on for assistance.)

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 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 are the total costs of the program? Do the fees include books and shipping, if necessary? Are there any additional expenses I might incur? Is there any financial aid available?

- ✏ Is occasional attendance on the campus 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?
- ✏ If the program is synchronous (that is, given at a particular time), 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 equipment will I need to receive it? If it is a computer-based program, does the computer that I use meet the requirements of the program?
- ✏ Will the information be delivered to me in a timely enough fashion (for example, if it is delivered by mail) for me to complete the course?
- ✏ What academic or technical assistance is offered throughout the program by the institution or the body responsible for delivering the program?

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 available that will serve your needs.

Distance education is constantly expanding, and many institutions see it as a form of education that can be adapted to suit many of their programs and degree offerings. New programs are coming on-line each day.

What Type 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 you choose. Distance education can save you the expenses of travel, room, and board, but the actual academic fees usually correspond to those of traditional learning.

If any period of residency on campus is required during the course of the program, you should include those costs in your budget as well. You should also inquire about the costs of the learning materials needed to complete each course, and allow for the shipping fees and import duties that you might face. 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 from U.S. educational information and advising centers and on the World Wide Web at http://educationusa.state.gov.

If there is any campus residency requirement for your program, you probably will 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 a U.S. educational information or advising center and the 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.

Distance Education Versus Correspondence Education

Distance education and correspondence education differ mainly in the method of instruction. Correspondence education is a form of distance education that deals with students primarily through the mail and on a one-to-one basis, with no semblance of a classroom setting. Students in correspondence programs must complete the work assigned within a specified time frame.

Other forms of distance education can simulate the classroom experience through Internet chat-rooms, video-conferencing, and net-meetings in which the students can all join in to discuss topics and get immediate feedback from the instructor. Work for the course may require that a student be present at a given time for group or individual discussion.

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

Admission Requirements

Some people believe that distance education programs have no requirements for admission or that there are no prerequisites for an on-line degree program. Although this might be true in a very few cases, application procedures for enrollment into a distance education program are usually the same as those for an on-site program. In fact, if the institution offering the distance education program also offers campus-based programs, the requirements for applying will be exactly the same for both.

For admission to distance education programs, many institutions require satisfactory scores on admissions tests such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), and/or the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Application forms, similar to the ones you would fill out for an on-site program, are often required, along with transcripts showing your 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, before they accept applicants, require them to complete surveys and exercises in computer literacy. Consider spending some time practicing or refreshing any skills that you will need.

Once you are accepted into a program, it is important to find out what the arrangements are for receiving 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, you should be aware that, in general, completion of the program will take at least as long as completion of a program at a land-based site.

Other Things to Consider

Quality of the Program

You should research the history and quality of any distance education program to determine its value to you. Here are some questions that you might want to ask:

- ✏ How long has the institution been enrolling students in this program?
- ✏ How often and through what mechanism is the program reviewed for the currency of its curriculum?

- ✏ 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

The system of quality assurance of U.S. educational institutions is known as accreditation. It is important for you to know the accreditation status of any education program you might enroll in. If the program is not properly accredited, your degree may not be recognized by employers, government entities both in the United States and in your home country, or other institutions of higher learning. Please read chapter 4 in this booklet for further details on accreditation. However, here are some things you need to know in relation to distance education.

Accrediting Bodies: Accreditation is carried out by a number of national and regional accrediting bodies that are recognized by either the U.S. Department of Education or the Council on Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). It is important not only that an institution is accredited, but that it is accredited by a recognized body. Some questions you can ask are:

- ✏ Who accredits this institution?
- ✏ Does the U.S. Department of Education or CHEA recognize the accrediting body?
- ✏ Where can I find a full list of the other universities accredited by the accrediting body?

College-Based Programs: Distance education programs offered by an accredited college or university must be included in the overall accreditation of that institution. There is no such thing as a "partially accredited" institution, and, therefore, distance education programs must meet the accrediting body's standards and requirements.

Regional accreditation is the most commonly held type of institutional accreditation in the United States; it is carried out by six regional accrediting bodies. All of them have adopted specific regulations to ensure that students who earn degrees through distance education programs receive an education that is equivalent to the education they would receive on-site at a U.S. campus.

"Virtual" Universities: Regional accreditation of a college or university is possible even if the institution has no physical library, campus, or full-time faculty. For these institutions, located primarily in cyberspace, the process for attaining accreditation is quite similar to the one for campus-based institutions.

The institution completes a self-study, and its conformity to regional accreditation standards is validated through a visit by an evaluation team to the administering organization's office or headquarters. In addition to meeting the accrediting body's standards (as appropriate to cyberspace), the program has to demonstrate that its offerings are comparable to those offered on a traditional campus, that the academic qualifications of those who design the courses are appropriate to their field, and that students have guaranteed access to information resources beyond those generally available to the public through the Internet. Programs of virtual universities must be reviewed and updated as often as campus-based programs are.

Non-Regionally Accredited Institutions: If the institution is not regionally accredited, be sure to ask:

- ✏ Can you name some universities or employers that recognize degrees or credits from your institution? (Note: you are advised to verify any information given.)
- ✏ What provisions have been made in the event that the program is discontinued before I have completed my studies?

In general, students with degrees from institutions not accredited by a recognized body will find it difficult, if not impossible, to have their degrees recognized by any municipal, state, or federal agency, any foreign government, or the majority of private employers.

Security of the Program

Many potential employers, funding organizations, and government entities are concerned about the security and integrity of a degree earned through a distance education program. Therefore, you will need to find out what means the program uses to ensure that the students who are enrolled in the program complete the assignments and take examinations themselves. Then you will be able to inform prospective employers and other interested parties how the program has ensured the integrity of your degree.

For example, since the student and the instructor are not in the same place when an examination is given, how does the program ensure that the right person takes the test? Some accredited institutions require fish-eye cameras, which are now quite inexpensive, to be attached to computers in order to photograph the person using the computer. Others conduct biometric procedures, such as retina scans or thumbprints, to make sure that the person taking the test is indeed the person who signed up for the course. Finally, you should be aware that many programs require examinations to be proctored by a consular official, member of the clergy, officer in the U.S.

armed services, or faculty member of a U.S.-accredited institution.

Time for a Recap

✏ 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. Distance education may be accomplished in a number of ways.

✏ There is a wide range of distance education programs and of institutions that offer these programs in the United States.

✏ Students have different motivations for taking part in a distance education program, but in order to be successful all distance learners need privacy, an enjoyment of working independently, and the ability to work consistently. Students also should have the technical skills necessary to complete the assignments, as well as access to technical support when they need it.

✏ International time differences or a requirement to occasionally attend a U.S. campus will make it difficult for some students to pursue distance education.

✏ Costs for distance education are very similar to on-site programs. Application procedures are also usually the same as for campus-based programs.

✏ The quality and value of the program should be examined in terms of the program's curriculum; employment of recent graduates; and recognition of the degree, certificate, or diploma in the student's home country. Students attending institutions that are not accredited by a recognized body will find it difficult to have their degrees recognized by U.S. and home country government agencies, other educational institutions, and many private employers.

✏ The security and integrity of any distance education program are of great concern to potential employers; therefore, before enrolling, students should find out how the program ensures that students complete assignments and examinations themselves.

✏ If you have determined that distance education would work for you, and you meet the criteria outlined in this chapter, distance learning could be the road to a successful and exciting educational experience.

Useful Web Sites

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

Consumer's Guide to Choosing College Courses on the Internet
http://www.drake.edu/iaicu/consumerguide.html

Degree.net
http://www.degree.net/

Distance Education Clearinghouse
http://www.uwex.edu/disted/home.html

Distance Learning on the Net
http://www.hoyle.com/distance.htm

Global Distance Education Net
http://www1.worldbank.org/disted/

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

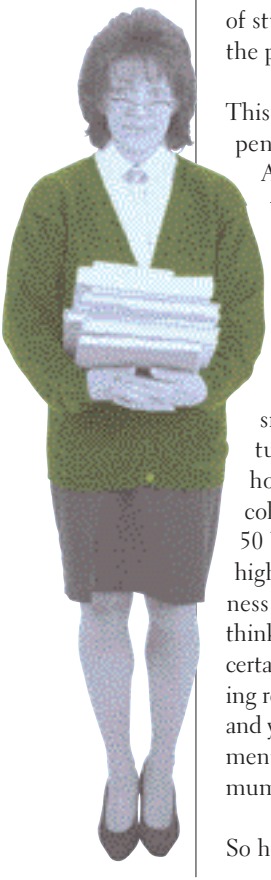
Web-Based Learning Resources Library
http://www.outreach.utk.edu/weblearning

World Wide Web Virtual Library: Distance Education
http://www.cisnet.com/~cattales/Deducation.html

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. Accreditation is a complex issue, so we recommend that you read the entire chapter to ensure you fully understand this important topic.



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, however, the federal government does not regulate colleges and universities in any direct way. Each of the 50 U.S. states has a system of licensing institutions of higher education, which allows them to conduct business and issue degrees legally in that state. You might think that if a school is licensed, it means that it has met certain minimum educational standards. However, licensing requirements vary greatly from one state to another, and you *cannot* use licensing by a state education department as an indication that an institution meets minimum standards.

So how *can* you know if an institution or program does

meet an acceptable level of quality? In the United States, institutions and programs that meet and maintain certain educational standards are said to be "accredited," or to hold "accreditation." Accreditation is carried out by organizations called accrediting bodies or accrediting associations, which determine and regulate these standards. Being licensed in a particular state is not the same as being accredited.

The U.S. Department of Education defines accreditation as "a status granted to an institution which indicates that it is meeting its mission and the standards of the association and seems likely to continue to meet that mission for the foreseeable future." 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.

Why Accreditation Is Important

In the United States, one of the major indicators of the quality of an institution is its accreditation status. If the school you attend is not properly accredited, you may find that your degree is not recognized in the United States or in many other countries around the world, or by other universities, professional associations, employers, and government ministries and departments.

Before you apply to study in the United States, it is very important to check with your home country's department or ministry of education about whether there are any restrictions on recognition of U.S. degrees or U.S. universities. In particular, ask if there are specific requirements concerning the accreditation of U.S. institutions or programs.

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 if it is, consult the organizations' Web sites (http://www.chea.org or http://www.aspa-usa.org), or look it up in the directory *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education* (see the bibliography at the end of this booklet). Copies of the directory are available at U.S. educational information and advising centers worldwide.

- It is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. While the department does not get involved in the process of accrediting institutions, it publishes a list of accrediting agencies that it recognizes as reliable authorities on the quality of education or training provided by institutions of higher education. For a full list, see http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/natlagencies.html.

Recognition by the U.S. Department of Education or membership in CHEA or ASPA is an indicator of the reliability of an accrediting association.

What Accreditation Signifies

The specific requirements and standards of each accrediting body are unique. 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 objec-

tives of the institution's or program's activities;

- control the resources necessary to achieve its purposes; that is, 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;
- give evidence that it will continue to achieve those objectives for the near future.

Accreditation of individual programs (called programmatic accreditation) imposes the same requirements as accreditation of institutions, but narrows its focus to the particular program rather than the whole institution. Consequently, there are usually some requirements for programmatic accreditation that are specifically related to the practice of the particular profession concerned.

What Do the Accrediting Bodies Do?

All accrediting associations have two purposes: to assess the performance of an institution or program in relation to its stated mission and the accrediting body's standards, and to foster improvement in member programs or institutions.

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

- The institution carries out a self-study and writes a report that is submitted to the accrediting body. The self-study and report include the institution's mission, academic programs, faculty, information resources, student services, physical facilities, and system of governance.
- This is followed by a visit by an outside group of academics, whose job is to validate what the institution

has said about itself in its self-study, 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 then decides whether or not to grant accreditation. Accreditation is never partial, and there is no difference between the terms "fully accredited" and "accredited."

Once an institution has successfully had an accreditation visit and decision, the process continues. Institutions or programs must file annual reports, reply to any 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 excellence. Accrediting associations require that institutions 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, which will allow them to meet the demands of society in the future.

Institutional Accreditation

There are two basic types of accreditation for degree-granting institutions in the United States: institutional and programmatic. As its name implies, 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. (For more information, see the "Programmatic Accreditation" section in this chapter.) Several different accrediting associations or bodies carry out each of these types of accreditation.

Institutional accreditation can be divided into two types: regional accreditation and national accreditation.

Regional Accreditation

Regional accreditation is the primary type of institutional accreditation used in the United States. It is carried out by six organizations that cover different geographic regions of the country. The six regional accrediting bodies collectively serve more than 3,500 of the approximately 3,600 degree-granting institutions in the United States. They are:

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools — Commission on Higher Education (MSA/CHE) http://www.msache.org
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges — Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE) http://www.neasc.org/cihe/cihe.htm
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools— The Higher Learning Commission http://www.ncacihe.org/
- Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges — Commission on Colleges and Universities http://www.cocnasc.org/
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) — Commission on Colleges http://www.sacscoc.org
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) — The Senior College Commission http://www.wascweb.org/

National Accreditation

In addition, there are several national accrediting bodies that carry out institutional accreditation and are recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or the U.S. Department of Education. For a complete and current list of these organizations, see:

- ✏ Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education
  http://www.chea.org
- ✏ U.S. Department of Education
  http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/accreditation/natlagencies.html

Regional Versus 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 all regional accrediting associations require that institutions allow faculty and students the academic freedom to pursue all ideas, these institutions are not eligible for regional accreditation.

If you are considering a U.S. institution that holds national accreditation but not regional accreditation, you need to get answers to these questions:

- ✏ Will my home country's government, professional associations, and employers recognize a degree from an institution accredited by a particular 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 do with their degrees 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?

You should also be aware that many U.S. institutions that hold regional accreditation do not recognize credits or degrees earned at other U.S. institutions that are nationally accredited. This will be important to you 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.

For further information and advice, consult staff at a U.S. educational information or advising center in your home country.

Institutions Not Holding Recognized Accreditation

In many countries, government authorities require colleges and universities to obtain accreditation, but in the United States accreditation is voluntary. Therefore, an institution can choose whether it wishes to be regionally or nationally accredited, or even if it wishes to be accredited at all. Or an institution may be accredited by a body that is not recognized. 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 will 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 will be difficult to transfer credits to, or to have degrees recognized by, other U.S. institutions that do hold recognized regional or national accreditation.
- ✏ Governments of other countries will often not accept degrees from, or recognize, 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 also the education that you receive may not be as current or comprehensive or of as a high a standard 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 for evaluations of their experience.

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.

A programmatic accrediting body is considered a "recognized" accrediting body if it is a member of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA). Membership in either CHEA or ASPA is an indicator of the reliability of a programmatic accrediting association. The U.S. Department of Education recognizes national and regional accrediting bodies only and does not get involved in programmatic accreditation.

For a complete and current list of programmatic accrediting bodies recognized by CHEA, refer to the publication *Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education* or consult CHEA's Web site at http://www.chea.org. A few programmatic accrediting bodies are not members of CHEA, but instead belong to ASPA. A full list of these organizations can be found on the ASPA Web site at http://www.aspa-usa.org.

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 the specific field. If you are considering working in a particular profession, check 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.

U.S. Institutions and Programs Outside the United States

There are two types of U.S. institutions operating outside the United States: those that operate independently and do not have a U.S. campus, and those that are part of, or in some other way closely connected with, a U.S.-based institution.

U.S. universities and colleges that are located outside the United States and do not have a U.S. campus can apply for accreditation by recognized U.S. accrediting bodies. They will be included in the list of accredited institutions or programs that each accrediting body maintains, usually in a special section for institutions outside the United States. These institutions will have to meet the same accreditation standards, and will have the same level of recognition, as any accredited U.S. institution located inside the United States.

Institutions that are part of a U.S.-based college or university, or that are in some other way affiliated with an institution in the United States, are known as branch campuses. Institutional accrediting bodies will incorporate branch campuses outside the United States within their accreditation of U.S. institutions. However, to be eligible for inclusion in their accreditation, the branch campus must meet the following criteria and procedures:

- ✏ Any degrees earned at the branch campus must be clearly conferred by the U.S. institution.
- ✏ The branch campus must be able to offer the same quality and level of instruction as the home campus in the United States, and it must be possible for students to take 50 percent or more of the credits toward

the U.S. degree or complete their program at the branch campus site.

- ✏ The branch campus site must undergo the same process of self-study, visitation, and consideration by the accrediting body as the home campus.
- ✏ The branch campus must be subject to the academic governance of the U.S. campus.
- ✏ U.S. institutions must inform the accrediting body before establishing a branch, and that branch must be visited within six months of starting operations to ensure its conformity to the accrediting body's regulations.

Sometimes accredited U.S. colleges and universities form agreements with institutions in other countries to offer their degree programs on those institutions' campuses outside the United States. In these situations, the degree program can be considered a branch campus for accreditation purposes as long as it is possible to complete the full degree at the host institution outside the United States, and the degree is clearly conferred by the U.S. university or college.

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 a U.S. educational information or advising center for further advice. Remember that credits and degrees earned at such an institution will be treated as foreign credentials by your government and evaluated according to the same criteria used in accepting credits from a campus in the United States.

Time for a Recap

- ✏ 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, unlike in many countries, 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 any 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 be meeting that mission effectively; and to give evidence that it will continue to meet its mission for the foreseeable future. Accrediting bodies also aim to foster improvement in their member institutions.

✏ Accrediting bodies' requirements vary, but all require that institutions or programs 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. A number of accrediting bodies carry out each type of accreditation.

✏ Institutional accrediting bodies are recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) and/or the U.S. Department of Education.

✏ Institutional accreditation may be either regional, or less commonly, national. 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 either recognized by CHEA or are members of the Association of Specialized and Programmatic Accreditors (ASPA). Programmatic accreditation of a degree program, department, or school may be a requirement for practicing in certain professions.

Useful Web Sites

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

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

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education
http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/

Regional Accrediting Bodies:

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools — Commission on Higher Education (MSA/CHE)
http://www.msache.org

New England Association of Schools and Colleges — Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE)
http://www.neasc.org/cihe/cihe.htm

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools — The Higher Learning Commission
http://www.ncacihe.org/

Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges — Commission on Colleges and Universities
http://www.cocnasc.org

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) — Commission on Colleges
http://www.sacscoc.org

Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) — The Senior College Commission
http://www.wascweb.org/

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Many of the publications listed below are available at U.S. educational information and advising centers for reference use.

Chapter 1 — Short-Term Study in the United States

The Advising Quarterly. Published quarterly. America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST), Washington, DC.
http://www.amideast.org

Advisory List of International Educational Travel and Exchange Programs. Published annually. Council on Standards for International Educational Travel (CSIET), Alexandria, VA.
http://www.csiet.org

Bricker's International Directory: University Executive Programs. Bricker's Short-Term Executive Programs. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Funding for United States Study: A Guide for International Students and Professionals. 1996. Institute of International Education, New York, NY.
http://www.iie.org

The Grants Register. Published annually. Macmillan Reference, London, England.
http://www.macmillan-reference.co.uk

Occupational Outlook Handbook. Published annually. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, DC.(Explains the training requirements for different professions and careers in the United States.

Also available on the World Wide Web at http://stats.bls.gov/oco)

Peterson's Guide to Two-Year Colleges. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Peterson's Internships. Published annually. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Peterson's Vocational & Technical Schools East. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Peterson's Vocational & Technical Schools West. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Princeton Review: America's Top Internships. Published annually. Mark Oldman and Samer Hamadeh. Random House, New York, NY.
http://www.review.com

Training and Development Organizations Directory.
Janice McLean, Editor. 1994. Gale Group, Farmington Hills, MI.
http://www.gale.com

Chapter 2 — English Language Programs

A number of publications list language programs located throughout the United States. Of these, perhaps the most comprehensive is *English Language and Orientation Programs in the United States*, a directory of English language programs published by the Institute of International Education (see below). Professional associations, such as the Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP) and the American Asso-

ciation of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP), also publish directories of their member language programs with descriptions and contact information for each.

A growing number of magazines have appeared in recent years that contain advertisements for English language schools. Such magazines also provide information and advice for students considering enrolling in English language programs, and they contain articles about different aspects of language study in the United States.

The Advising Quarterly. Published quarterly. America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST), Washington, DC.
http://www.amideast.org

American Association of Intensive English Programs: Member Profiles 1999-2000. Philadelphia, PA.
http://www.aaiep.org

Directory of Professional Preparation Programs in TESOL in the United States and Canada. Ellen Garshick, Editor. 1999-2001. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), Alexandria, VA.
http://www.tesol.org

English Language and Orientation Programs in the United States. Institute of International Education, New York, NY.
http://www.iie.org

Foreign Students' Guide to American Schools, Colleges, and Universities. Published annually. George Kalmar, Editor. International Education Service, Santa Monica, CA.
http://www.ies-ed.com

UCIEP: A Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs in the USA – Member Profiles. Stillwater, OK.
http://www.uciep.org

Chapter 3 — Distance Education

The Advising Quarterly. Published quarterly. America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST), Washington, DC.
http://www.amideast.org

Campus-Free College Degrees: Thorson's Guide to Accredited College Degrees Through Distance Learning. Marcie Kisner Thorson. 2000. Thorson Guides, Tulsa, OK.
http://www.college-distancedegree.com/

College Degrees by Mail and Modem. 1999. Ten Speed Press, Berkeley, CA.
http://www.tenspeedpress.com

The Independent Study Catalog, A Guide to Over 10,000 Correspondence Courses. 1995. Published by Peterson's for the National University Continuing Education Association, Washington, DC. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

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http://www.petersons.com

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http://www.petersons.com

Virtual College. Pam Dixon. 1996. Peterson's, Princeton, NJ.
http://www.petersons.com

Chapter 4 - Accreditation

Bear's Guide to Earning Degrees Nontraditionally. John Bear and Mariah Bear. 1999. C&B Publishing, Benicia, CA.
http://www.degree.net

Accredited Institutions of Postsecondary Education. Published Annually. American Council for Education on behalf of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). Copies available at http://www.oryxpress.com.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Academic adviser: A member of the faculty who helps and advises students solely on academic matters.

Academic year: The period of formal academic instruction, usually from August or September to May or June. It may be divided into terms of varying lengths: semesters, trimesters, or quarters.

Accreditation: The system of maintaining and approving standards at U.S. educational institutions, which is carried out by organizations called accrediting bodies or accrediting associations. Accreditation is defined by the U.S. Department of Education as "a status granted to an institution which indicates that it is meeting its mission and the standards of the association and seems likely to continue to meet that mission for the foreseeable future."

Advanced placement or advanced standing: A waiver of some of the studies normally required for an undergraduate degree, granted to a student on the basis of prior study or experience.

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).

Asynchronous: A term used to describe distance education study in which instruction can be received by students wherever and whenever they desire, as long as they have access to the Internet or, in the case of correspondence education, to the mail. See also "Synchronous."

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

Baccalaureate degree: The degree of "bachelor" that is conferred upon graduates of most U.S. colleges and universities.

Bachelor's degree: Degree conferred by an institution of higher learning after the student has accumulated a certain number of undergraduate credits. Usually, a bachelor's degree takes four years to earn, and it is a prerequisite for studies in a graduate program.

Campus: The land on which the buildings of a college or university are located.

Certificate of Eligibility: A U.S. government document, issued by the institution at which a student has been accepted, that enables the student to apply for a visa.

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. Class rank also may be expressed in percentiles.

College: A postsecondary institution that provides an undergraduate education. College, in a separate sense, is a division of a university; for example, college of business.

College catalog: An official publication giving information about an institution's academic programs, facilities, entrance requirements, and student life.

Community, technical, or junior college: A postsecondary institution that offers programs of up to two years' duration, including the associate degree in the arts or sciences (A.A. or A.S.).

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

Credits: Units institutions use to record the completion of courses of instruction (with passing or higher 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 "credit units."

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 (for example, English department or history department).

Distance education: Formal learning in which the student and the instructor are not in the same place at the same time.

Doctorate (for example, Ph.D.): The highest academic degree conferred by a university on students who have completed at least three years of graduate study beyond the bachelor's 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 reserved for students on the campus of a college or university.

Faculty: The members of the teaching staff, and occasionally of the administrative staff, of an educational institution.

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

Fellowship: A study grant of financial aid, usually awarded to a graduate student.

Financial aid: A general term that includes all types of money, loans, and part-time jobs offered to a student.

Foreign student adviser (FSA): Also known as an international student adviser (ISA). The person associated with a school, college, or university who is in charge of providing information and guidance to foreign students in such areas as U.S. government regulations, visas, academic regulations, social customs, language, financial or housing problems, and certain legal matters.

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

Full-time student: One who is enrolled in an institution and taking a full load of courses. The number of courses and hours is specified by the institution.

Grade: The evaluation of a student's academic work.

Grade point average (GPA): A system of recording academic achievement based on an average, calculated by multiplying the numerical grade received in each course by the number of credit hours studied.

Grading system: Schools, colleges, and universities in the United States commonly use letter grades from "A" to "D" to indicate the quality of a student's academic performance.

Graduate: A student who has completed a course of study, either at the high school or college level. A graduate program at a university is a study course for students who hold a bachelor's degree.

High school: The last three or four years of the 12-year school education system in the United States; secondary school.

Intensive English Program (IEP): A type of English language program that usually includes 20 to 30 hours of classroom work per week.

International student adviser (ISA): See "Foreign student adviser."

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

Lecture: Common method of instruction in college and university courses, in which a professor addresses students in classes numbering from 20 to several hundred students. Lectures may be supplemented with regular small group discussions led by teaching assistants.

Maintenance: Living expenses while attending a college or university, including room (living quarters), board (meals), books, clothing, laundry, local transportation, and miscellaneous expenses.

Major: A subject or area of studies in which students concentrate. Undergraduates usually choose a major after the first two years of a degree program.

Minor: A subject or area of studies in which students concentrate their studies, but to a lesser extent than in their major.

Nonresident student: A student who does not meet the residence requirements of the state. Tuition fees and admissions policies may differ for residents and nonresidents. International students are classified as nonresidents.

Notarization: The certification of a document, statement, or signature as authentic and true by a public official — known in the United States as a notary public. Applicants in other countries should have their documents certified or notarized in accordance with instructions.

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.

Prerequisite: Program or course that a student is required to complete before being permitted to enroll in a more advanced program or course.

Quarter: Period of study of approximately 10 to 12 weeks' duration.

Quiz: Short written or oral test; a quiz is less formal than an examination.

Recommendation, Letter of: A letter appraising an applicant's qualifications, written by a professor or employer who knows the applicant's character and work. Also called "personal recommendation," "personal endorsement," or "personal reference."

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

Scholarship: A study grant of financial aid usually given at the undergraduate level, which may be supplied in the form of a cancellation of tuition and/or fees.

Semester: Period of study of approximately 15 to 16 weeks' duration, usually half of an academic year.

Seminar: A form of small group instruction, combining independent research and class discussions under the guidance of a professor. Usually open to undergraduate seniors and graduate students.

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

Social Security Number (SSN): A number issued by the U.S. government to jobholders for payroll deductions. Many institutions use the Social Security Number as a student identification number.

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

Special student: A student at a college or university who is not enrolled as a candidate for a degree.

Synchronous: A term used to describe a distance education study program in which instruction is given at a particular time and, usually, at specific locations. See also "Asynchronous."

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

Test: Examination; any method for measuring the academic knowledge of a student.

Transcript: A certified copy of a student's educational record containing titles of courses, the number of credits earned, and the final grades in each course.

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

Trimester: Period of study of approximately 16 weeks in an academic year that is divided into three equal terms.

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

Undergraduate studies: Two- or four-year programs in a college or university after high school graduation leading to the associate or bachelor's degree.

University: An educational institution that usually maintains one or more four-year undergraduate colleges (or schools) with programs leading to bachelor's degrees, a graduate school of arts and sciences awarding master's degrees and doctorates (Ph.D.s), and graduate professional schools.

Vocational schools: Institutions that prepare students for semiprofessional or technical employment.

INDEX

Accreditation 9,14,21,35,43,48,51-53,56,70,75,76
- Accreditation process 59-60
- Degree recognition 57,62-64
- Institutional 60-63
- Licensing 56,68
- National 62-63
- Professional 60-61,68
- Programmatic 59,60-61,65-66,68-69
- Regional 61-63,69-70
- Transfer 63,64
- U.S. Department of Education 58

American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP) 35,43,73
Associate degree 3,76
Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA) 58,65,69

Bachelor's degree 3,77

Certificate of completion 20,30
Certificate of Eligibility 15,19,40,77
Community college 20,47,78
Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP) 35,43,73
Correspondence education 49,74
Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) 58,62,65,68-69,75

Diploma 20,30
Distance education 8-9,44-55,74,78
- Accreditation 51-53
- Admission requirements 49-50
- Costs 48
- Skills needed 45-46
- Types of institutions 47-48
- Types of programs 47
- Visas 48

Distance learning 55,74
Doctoral degree 29

DS-2019 Form 15,19

English language programs 3,33-43,72-74
Admission requirements 39
Admission to academic programs 39-40
Choosing a program 33-39
Class structure 38
Costs 38-39
Curriculum 36
Length of study 37
Program setting 37-38
Standards 35-36
Visas 40-41
English language skills 8,37,39

Four-year college 20

Glossary 76-83
Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT) 50
Graduate Record Examination (GRE) 50

High school exchanges 16-18
Useful organizations 17-18
Housing 13,38

I-20 A-B Form 15,35,40-41
I-20 M-N Form 15
Institutional accreditation 52,60-63
Intensive English Program (IEP) 34-43,72-74,80

Junior college 20,47,78

NAFSA: Association of International Educators 36,43
National accreditation 62-63
Non-degree study 23-24

Ph.D. degree 78
Predeparture information 41
Professional accreditation 60-61

Programmatic accreditation 59,60-61,65-66,68-69

Regional accreditation 61-63,69-70
Degree recognition 57,62-64
Transfer possibilities 63,64
Rotary International 16,23

Scholarships 24,82
Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) 50
School exchanges 16-18
Short-term study 8,12-32
Choosing a program 12-13
Costs 14
Planning 12
Short-term university study 21-29
Non-degree study 23-24
Scholars and fellows 29
Special student 23-24
Summer session study 24-26
University exchange programs 22-23
Special student 23-24
Summer session 24-26

Technical education 20-21
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) 36,43,73
Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) 34,36,50
Test of Spoken English (TSE) 36
Training centers 20

U.S. Department of Education 35,51,57,58,62,65
U.S. educational information and advising centers 10-11,16-17,18,20,21,24,25,28,29,41,48,58,63,67,71
Locating 11

UCIEP (Consortium of University and College Intensive English Programs) 35,43,73
Unaccredited institutions 63-64
Recognition of degrees 64

Transferring credits 64
University exchange programs 22-23
Visas 15-16,17,19,40-41,48
F-1 student visa 15,17,40
J-1 exchange visitor visa 15,19
M-1 vocational student visa 15
Visiting fellows and scholars 29
Vocational education 20-21

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