

PREPARING FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

Guidelines on How to Apply to Colleges and Universities in the United States
(for students who have completed the *gymnasium* but not Swedish university studies)

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Attachments

- Higher Education in the United States
- Useful Internet Addresses



The Fulbright Commission provides comprehensive and unbiased information on all accredited U.S. institutions of higher education. There is an extensive library with university catalogs, reference books on higher education and financial aid, video presentations of many universities and much other useful material. Educational advisory services are offered by mail and telephone. You can also book an appointment with an educational adviser.

1. SELECTING A COLLEGE. ACCREDITATION.

For admission to an American college, a Swedish student should have completed *gymnasieskolan*. (For further details on the U.S. system of education, read the attachment entitled "Higher Education in the United States.")

The academic year at U.S. colleges and universities generally begins in August or September, and you should start to apply at least one year before you want to begin your studies. Application deadlines vary greatly, but some are as early as November for enrollment the following autumn. A few schools have deadlines as late as July the same year.

Since there are approximately 4,800 accredited institutions of higher education in the U.S., you should be prepared to devote considerable time to selecting the right one. There are many important academic aspects to consider when choosing a school such as which subjects you want to study, entrance requirements, competitiveness and application deadlines, as well as practical ones such as location, the setting (urban or rural), climate, extracurricular activities, and the size of the school.

You need to consider the costs for an academic year. Both private and state institutions charge tuition and fees, which can range from \$5,000 - \$40,000 for an academic year. This is the cost just to attend a university. In addition, room and board (meals) will cost between \$5,000 - \$23,000. Private expenses including insurance coverage will amount to at least \$2,300. For one academic year (nine months) you will probably need from \$12,300 - \$65,300 to cover tuition and fees, room and board, and private expenses. Further, you have to calculate with travel costs.

In the United States, there is no central office authorizing the universities to operate. Instead, there are recognized accrediting organizations. *Högskoleverket* and *Centrala Studiestödsnämnden* (CSN) require that you attend a regionally accredited school. If you are planning to study for a complete undergraduate degree, and later need an evaluation of your degree here in Sweden, you should check with *Högskoleverket* before you leave for the United States.

In addition to the accreditation of the university, there are recognized organizations accrediting specific educational programs in fields such as Architecture, Business Administration, Engineering, Journalism, Nursing, and many others. This type of accreditation is called professional accreditation, and is especially important if you intend to earn a degree in those fields.

In summary:

- If you want information on your major subject, contact the Fulbright Commission.
- If you want to sign up to attend an information meeting, call the Fulbright Commission. The sessions are usually held on Tuesdays at 15:00.

2. REQUESTING APPLICATIONS

After narrowing down your choice of institutions to a limited number (approximately 5 - 10), you can start looking for information on the application requirements for the specific schools you are interested in applying to. You will find this information on the homepage of the schools under the headline admissions/undergraduate international students.

3. TESTING

- Register for and take the test(s) required by the schools

Register for and take test(s)

Almost all colleges and universities require international students, whose native language is not English, to take an English language test, usually the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). Some universities accept other language tests than the TOEFL. You should check this directly with the schools that you are applying to. For detailed information about the TOEFL and where and when you can take the test you can visit the TOEFL web site at <http://www.ets.org/toefl>

Some colleges and universities also require international students to take the SAT I (Scholastic Assessment Test) and in some cases also one or more SAT II (Subject Tests). The SAT I is a multiple-choice test of one's ability to reason verbally and mathematically and a written essay. The SAT II are tests of abilities developed in 22 subjects. You should check the entrance requirements for the universities to which you intend to apply to find out if you must take the SAT I and which, if any, SAT II subject tests you should take. In the SAT-bulletin you find the dates when the tests are given. The SAT is given six times a year. The first test in each academic year is usually given in October, and the last in June. There are no tests given between June and October. One cannot take both the SAT I and the SAT II on the same test date. Updated information about the SAT can be found on the SAT web site: <http://www.collegeboard.com>.

(If you are planning to apply for athletic scholarships, you should register for the SAT I test, as universities require the test of athletic scholarship applicants. Make sure to have the score sent to NCAA Clearing House.)

Some universities require the ACT (American College Testing). This test is given in Sweden a few times a year. Complete information on the ACT can be found at <http://www.actstudent.org>.

Your test scores are important and you should prepare thoroughly for the tests.

4. FINANCIAL AID/SCHOLARSHIPS

Check possibilities for financial aid

You can apply for financial aid/scholarships both from American universities and from Swedish organizations. (The Fulbright Commission does not offer grants for undergraduate study, but only for graduate study or postdoctoral lecturing/research.)

Financial aid/scholarships from U.S. institutions

It is difficult for foreign students to get financial aid from U.S. colleges and universities, as competition for scholarships can be extreme. If you have an excellent school record or are good at a sport, you might be able to apply for financial aid/scholarships from the American institutions.

Financial aid from Swedish institutions

For information on receiving Swedish *studiemedel* to help finance your studies in the United States, see *Centrala Studiestödsnämnden* (CSN) at <http://www.csn.se>.

Financial aid information from Sweden

Several handbooks on Swedish scholarships are available at bookstores, libraries, and at the Fulbright Commission. There are also several websites with scholarship information.

5. SENDING IN APPLICATIONS

You should make your final choice of preferred institutions. We recommend that you apply to 3 - 5 institutions, your top preferences, as well as one or more other choices, "safety schools".

Institutions differ in their procedures and requirements for admission. Each will specify which documents and information it requires. Follow the instructions carefully. In addition to the application form, some or all of the items listed below can be required.

- **Application fee.** Most colleges charge an application fee, often ranging between \$25 - \$100. This fee usually must be sent with the application. It is not refundable.
- **Copies and certified translations of official records of your previous education.** You should get a copy of your *avgångsbetyg/slutbetyg* or latest transcripts *från gymnasieskolan*, as well as a certified translation and an explanation of grades. Some schools have preprinted forms. In some cases, you might be able to make your own translations and have them certified by your *gymnasieskola* or by *Notarius Publicus*. You can also consult an *Auktoriserad Översättare* but their services are expensive. Both *Notarii Publici* and *Översättare* are listed in *Gula Sidorna* of the telephone directory. For information on translations of the *gymnasieprogram*, contact your *gymnasieskola* or check *Skolverkets* homepage, where you will find information on translations and also descriptions of your program in English. The address is: <http://www.skolverket.se/> For translations of university transcripts, contact the appropriate office at your university.

The Swedish system with *vidimering* of documents is not accepted in the United States. All copies of documents need to be officially certified.

- **Evidence of English proficiency**, usually in the form of the TOEFL (see Section 3).
- **Academic entrance examinations**, usually the SAT I and the SAT II (see Section 3).
- **Letters of recommendation.** These play an important part in the admission process, and it is essential that you request them only from those upper secondary school and/or university teachers who are able to provide a thorough assessment of your academic performance. Letters of recommendation are confidential and must be sent directly to the university by the person recommending you. Remember to emphasize the necessity of their reaching the U.S. institutions before the deadline date.
- **Statement of finances.** Many colleges require students to submit proof of their financial resources for study in the U.S. This may be a section of the application or a separate form. If you plan to apply for study loans, CSN has special forms (*intyg om studiefinansiering*) which can be used. You may also be asked to get a statement from a bank that you (or your parents) have sufficient funds to support your studies (see Section 9 for sample letter).
- **Financial aid forms** (if financial aid is offered).
- **Essay.** Some colleges will require an essay on either a special topic or a topic chosen by the applicant. The length of the essay varies, and it is essential to follow the instructions given in the application form.

Before sending your application, check that it has been filled out carefully, neatly and completely and that all requested documents are enclosed. Incomplete applications risk not being considered.

6. ANSWERING ACCEPTANCES. ARRANGING HOUSING. INSURANCE.

It usually takes several months for colleges to make decisions on which students to admit. Some institutions notify students on a given date. Others review applications individually, and notify students right away ("rolling admissions"). Once you have been admitted, mail your application form for housing as soon as possible, since student housing fills up quickly. We recommend that you start out by living in student housing (dormitories), as it is easier to make friends upon arrival at a new campus, practical to have room and meals arranged for, and usually cheaper than living alone in an apartment.

Once you have accepted an offer of admission, a commitment to attend the college has been made. You may be required to send a deposit of \$50 - \$500 as an indication of your intention to enroll. Besides writing a letter of acceptance to the institution whose admission you want to accept, you should also notify the institutions whose offers of admission you decline.

Find out about the health insurance plan that your university offers. Some universities require that all international students be covered under the university insurance plan, while others accept insurance plans arranged in the home country. Be very careful in checking the various possibilities, as having good insurance coverage is imperative in the United States. CSN offers an insurance plan at a reasonable cost. You should also check the university's immunization regulations.

7. VISAS

After you accept an offer of admission, the school will send you a Certificate of Eligibility (referred to as the I-20 form) which you need for a student visa (F-1 visa). After you have received your I-20 form, check with the Consular Section of the American Embassy at the Embassy homepage: www.usemb.se for instructions on how to apply for a student visa.

8. ARRIVAL AT COLLEGE AND REGISTRATION

After arriving on campus, visit the international student adviser, who is responsible for helping international students with social adjustment and practical matters. It is very important that you ask about registration procedures and meet with your academic adviser. You must register for classes as early as possible to ensure that you can enroll in the courses you wish to take.

Most colleges and universities have an orientation period before classes begin to help acquaint new students with the school and with campus life. Some have a special orientation program for international students as well. These programs provide an invaluable introduction to American study and academic life and we strongly encourage you to participate.

9. SAMPLE OF FINANCIAL CERTIFICATION FORM

To Whom It May Concern:

We have been informed that Mr. Bo Ek (Swedish ID-number xx), born on January 1, 1989, intends to study at a university in the United States, and that he has been requested to submit evidence that he has sufficient funds at his disposal for this purpose.

Mr. Ek's mother, Ms. Eva Ek, is a valued client of our bank and has declared herself prepared to pay the costs of her son's stay in the United States and his return to Sweden. We hereby certify that her account No. xx shows a balance as of today of SEK xx, the counter-value of which is, at the present rate of exchange, about U.S. dollars xx.

(dated and signed by bank employee and written on official bank letterhead)



The Swedish Fulbright Commission was established in 1952 by an executive agreement between the Swedish and U.S. governments. Its primary objective is to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Sweden through grants to outstanding Swedish and American graduate students, lecturers, and researchers and through information on higher education in the United States.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The term "higher education" is used to indicate studies beyond secondary school (*efter gymnasieskolan*). It includes two-year community or junior colleges, four-year colleges, universities and professional schools. Admission to higher education usually requires the completion of upper-secondary school (*gymnasium*) or the equivalent.

In general, the terms "college" and "university" are used interchangeably. A college can be defined as an institution of higher education that offers four-year programs of undergraduate study leading to a bachelor's degree (similar to, for instance, a *fil kand or civilekonomexamen*), or two-year programs leading to "associate degrees" (no Swedish equivalent).

Institutions with two-year programs are referred to as junior or community colleges. They can offer academic as well as vocational programs, are less competitive, have later deadlines for application and may have lower tuition charges. Most two-year schools do not offer housing.

A university is a collective institution that usually includes one or more four-year undergraduate colleges (schools), a graduate school awarding master's and doctoral degrees in the humanities, the arts, the social and natural sciences, and graduate professional schools (for instance in dentistry, engineering, law, medicine, and veterinary medicine).

During the four years of a college or university program leading to a bachelor's degree, the student is known as an undergraduate. The student is classified according to the year of study: first year--freshman, second year--sophomore, third year--junior, fourth year--senior. Some bachelor's degrees require five years of undergraduate study, e.g. programs in architecture, art, and engineering.

During their first two years at college, students usually follow a general program of courses in a variety of fields. Many of these courses are compulsory for all undergraduate students regardless of the final area of specialization (major). Some compulsory courses could be American history, American government, English composition, mathematics, a second language, and physical education. American undergraduates study several different subjects simultaneously during an academic term, as opposed to the Swedish university approach of studying one subject at a time. The purpose of the first two years of general study is to help the student decide the area of study in which to specialize and to complete the general course requirements for graduation. Before beginning their third year of instruction, students select their major, and the majority of the course work during the last two or three years is in this or related fields.

In setting up requirements for diplomas or degrees, most colleges and universities measure the quantity of study by credit hours. (Some universities in California still use a system with units instead of credits.) Each hour of attendance at a course, each week, for one semester or quarter, gives the student one semester or quarter hour of credit. Thus a course which meets three hours a week for one semester gives a student three credits. The average undergraduate student takes 12 to 16 credit hours per semester or quarter.

The quality of work done by a student in a course is recorded at the end of a term in the form of a letter or number grade. The grade is based on the student's performance on short examinations (quizzes), midterm examination, final examination, participation in class discussions, and written papers during the term.

The following is a list of letter grades, the degree of proficiency and quality points each represents:

Letter grade	A	B	C	D	F
Degree of proficiency	Excellent	Good	Average	Passing	Failure

Quality points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0
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Examinations are generally written rather than oral, and short examinations are given at intervals during the term. Written papers are also part of the course work. A final examination is given at the end of the course. At the end of the four-year program, many institutions require a comprehensive examination covering all aspects of the major field.

The study pace at American universities is generally very high. Furthermore, deadlines for homework and reports are not negotiable and tests cannot be retaken!

Certain professional programs such as dentistry, medicine, law and veterinary medicine can be started only after a student has obtained a bachelor's degree.

Many programs in physical and occupational therapy can only be started after a bachelor's degree. A teaching certificate requires a year of study after the bachelor's degree.

SOME USEFUL INTERNET ADDRESSES

Department of State: <http://www.educationusa.state.gov/>

National Center for Education Statistics: <http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

Department of Education: <http://www.ed.gov/NLE/USNEI/> and <http://www.students.gov>

Peterson's Education Center: <http://www.petersons.com>

Information on the SAT test, and on colleges and universities: <http://www.collegeboard.com>

Information on the TOEFL test: <http://www.ets.org/toefl>

Information on the ACT test: <http://www.actstudent.org>

Information on colleges and universities:

<http://www.collegenet.com/>

<http://www.collegexpress.com>

<http://www.collegeview.com>

<http://www.useduguides.com>

<http://www.embarc.com>

Information on community colleges: <http://www.communitycollegeusa.com/>

Information on language programs: <http://www.intensiveenglishusa.com>

Financial aid/scholarships:

www.stipendielistan.se

www.edupass.org/finaid

www.globalgrant.com

www.lychnis.com/se

www.mytellus.com

College athletics:

<http://www.ncaa.org>

<http://www.universitysports.com/>

<http://www.naia.org>

<http://njcaa.org>

<http://collegiateathletics.com>

<http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org>

Career information:

Occupational Outlook Handbook: www.bls.gov/oco

Information on the Swedish educational system in English and translations of your *gymnasieprogram* can be found at *Skolverkets* homepage: <http://www.skolverket.se/>

Information on *studiemedel*: <http://www.csn.se>