



Studying in the United States

There are over 4,800 accredited colleges and universities in the United States. Although there are slight differences between a college and a university, the two terms are used interchangeably. Approximately 623,000 international students are studying in the U.S.; over 32,000 are from Africa and of those, almost 1,900 are from Cameroon. Generally, Cameroonian students need to pass their *Baccalauréat* or GCE A levels in order to apply to a U.S. college as an undergraduate; students who wish to pursue graduate degrees in the U.S. may apply after receiving their Bachelor's degree, Master's degree, *licence* or *maîtrise*. **This document focuses mainly on undergraduate study, but students interested in graduate degrees will find helpful information as well.**

How to Conduct a College Search: What to Look for in a College

It can be overwhelming to narrow down the list of 4,800 colleges to 10–12 schools where you would like to apply. You need to determine what is important to you in a college and let those criteria guide your search. When looking for a good fit or match, you may want to consider the following:

- **Size:** Colleges in the U.S. can range from a few hundred students to over 50,000 students. A college is considered “small” if it has 5,000 or fewer students; “medium-sized” if it has 5,000–10,000 students; and “large” if it has over 10,000 students. Think about the environment in which you learn best. Do you like big classes with lectures, where a professor speaks the majority of the time, or do you prefer smaller, interactive classes where students have the chance to speak? Find out what courses you are likely to take in your first year, and the average size of those classes. Keep in mind that as you progress through your studies, you will have fewer students in your classes regardless of the overall size of the school.
- **Location:** There are colleges in rural areas, small towns, and major cities. Do you want to see cornfields? Mountains? Ocean? Do you want to have access to museums, theater, or concerts? Is public transportation important? Do you want a school that has a campus with lots of green space, or do you prefer a campus spread out in an urban area?
- **Faculty:** Find out who teaches the introductory courses you are likely to take in your first year—professors or graduate students? Is the emphasis at the college on teaching or research, on undergraduate or graduate students? How easy is it to contact the professor? Does he or she set aside time to meet with students? Do professors have experience teaching abroad or experience teaching international students?
- **Academic Programs:** Think about your academic goals and future plans. Have you already chosen a major (area of study)? Are you interested in pre-professional programs like business, medicine, etc.? Will you need specific facilities like research labs in order to reach your goals? Are there opportunities for internships to gain experience in your field?
- **Financial Aid:** A college education in the U.S. can range from \$15,000 to over \$50,000 per year. Examine your family funds and determine how much your family can afford to spend each year. If necessary, look for colleges that offer partial financial aid and scholarships for international students. Funding may be available at some colleges to highly competitive international students who have high marks in a difficult course of study, high TOEFL and SAT scores, who are leaders in their schools, and participate in extracurricular activities.
- **Social and Cultural Environment:** Each college attracts different types of students—competitive, conservative, liberal, athletic, service-oriented, etc. What appeals to you—a student body that supports sports teams? That attends religious services? Some colleges have a very diverse student body with many international students, while others have less diversity. Is this important to you? Do you want a school where international and American students socialize with each other? What kinds of support services are available for international students (orientation, special advisors, etc.)?
- **Other factors worth considering:** selectivity (how hard it is to get accepted), housing, safety, retention, alumni satisfaction.

How to Conduct a College Search: Where to Look for Information

There are many sources of information on U.S. colleges and universities.

- **Books:** College Board's *International Student Handbook*, Peterson's *Applying to Colleges and Universities in the United States*, *The Fiske Guide to Colleges*, Princeton Review's *The Best 366 Colleges*, College Board's *Book of Majors*, Peterson's *Guide to Four-Year Colleges*
- **Websites:** www.educationUSA.info, www.petersons.com, www.review.com, www.collegeboard.com, www.toefl.org, www.commonapp.org, www.gocollege.com, www.eduPASS.org, www.college-scholarships.com, www.scholarstuff.com, www.fastweb.com, individual college websites (address ends in "edu")
- **EducationUSA Advising Center (EAC):** Located at the U.S. Embassy in Yaoundé, the EAC has many resources to help students explore the possibility of attending college in the U.S.: books, computer access, workshops on a variety of topics, and individual advising. For more information on EAC services and programs, please visit http://yaounde.usembassy.gov/educational_advising.html.

How to Apply to U.S. Colleges and Universities: the Application

In the U.S., most students submit college applications electronically using www.commonapp.org. Application forms may also be downloaded directly from a college's website. Though applications can vary from college to college, a typical application consists of:

- **Personal data form** (name, address, information about schooling, parent(s), etc.)
- **Official academic records** (transcript, examination results)
- **Standardized tests results**
 - Undergraduate students may need to take the SAT; see www.collegeboard.com for more information
 - Graduate students take the GRE or GMAT (for business school); see www.gre.org or www.mba.com
 - All students need to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language or TOEFL, which measures English proficiency at the university level in listening, speaking, writing, and reading; see www.toefl.org for more information
- **Teacher recommendations**
- **Personal statement** (about your interests, motivation, goals, etc.)
- **Certification of Finances form and a financial aid application** (if your family cannot provide all of the funds)

How to Apply to U.S. Colleges and Universities: Timetable

If you would like to study in the U.S., you must start the process EARLY. Here is a timetable to help you get organized:

- **April–August:** Think, plan, and assess academic and financial resources; research online and in the EAC to select the 10 best colleges for you
- **September–December:** Fill out forms, write essays, and obtain transcripts and recommendations, and submit applications on time
- **March:** Admission decisions arrive
- **June–August:** Apply for a student visa, attend a pre-departure orientation
- **August:** Start your new adventure in the U.S.!

Additional Questions

If you have any additional questions, please contact:

Fatimah A. Mateen

EducationUSA Advisor

U.S. Embassy Yaoundé

YaoundeEDU@state.gov