



# **Applying to the United States**

**July 2014**

## **APPLYING TO THE U.S.A.**

Applying to US colleges and universities can be done through the Common Application ([www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org)) or directly via paper / online application forms usually available through institutional websites. There are many websites that offer comprehensive assistance and information about the university/course selection process as well as the application process, the most helpful being that of The College Board ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)). Please remember that counselors and institutional publications available online and at school are there to guide you through the application process.

There is no perfect formula to getting the search process right. Most students find a moment of clarity which allows them to focus their attention on a few institutions that excite them. Certainty only comes once you have been at an institution so don't expect to know for sure. However, trust your instincts and research, and you will surely make a good choice. It is a process of elimination, weighing options, and long hours of thought. When all the research is done and it is time to apply, there are usually still questions to ask, but you know that you have certainly answered almost all the critical ones and therefore can be sure of yourself.

**Please note that the terms "institution", "university" and "college" are used interchangeably throughout this document since both offer undergraduate degrees with the only distinction between the two terms being that universities also offer post-undergraduate degrees such as Masters and Ph.Ds.**

Here is a suggested set of steps that you may follow to apply:

1. Research universities and available courses using the internet or publications
2. Check requirements such as deadlines, essays, testing and documents
3. Almost every university requires SAT I and often SAT II Subject Tests / TOEFL so register for the appropriate testing
4. Shortlist eight to ten universities where you wish to apply based on criteria that are important to you (location, cost, academics, style, scholarships and more)
5. Common Application vs. direct application
6. Early Decision vs. Early Action vs. Normal
7. Essays and personal statements
8. Recommendations and supporting documents
9. Financial Aid forms and documents (if applicable)
10. Admissions decisions and responses
11. Once your university choice is finalized, begin the U.S.A. visa process
12. Get ready for university

## 1. Research universities and available courses

Research a wide variety of universities and available courses using:

- a. The Common Application, College Board, institutional and other websites (e.g. [www.commonapp.org](http://www.commonapp.org), [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), [www.georgetown.edu](http://www.georgetown.edu), [www.usnews.com](http://www.usnews.com))
- b. Newspaper articles, college reference and guide books, e.g., Peterson's Guides, College Board's College Handbook and Princeton Review's Top Colleges (some of these publications are available in the library)
- c. Friends and family, preferably alumni of U.S.A. universities or relatives of students who have attended U.S.A. universities.

**Please remember that every source has its own methodology for recommending universities and presenting information. It is up to you to sift through all the information to determine what is accurate and relevant to your needs.**

Many publications are available in the Southshore library as reference materials so while you may not borrow them to take home, you can certainly use them in school. Also, your counselor will have similar publications and access to university catalogs.

Select at least twenty universities in this initial phase so that you can research them in-depth before deciding on the final eight to ten where you will apply.

## 2. Check requirements such as deadlines, essays, testing and documents

Please pay careful attention to specific deadlines and other requirements. It is very easy to misread requirements and the biggest crime would be to lose the opportunity to attend your top choice simply because of a preventable mistake!

There are usually different deadlines for International Applicants but there may also be specific deadlines for Priority Applications, Early Decision / Early Action, Housing, Testing, Financial Aid and more. You must determine which one applies to your particular situation and it is always a good idea to email or call the institution if you have any doubts at all.

Once you know the deadlines for all your institutions, formulate a complete plan to ensure that you do not miss any of them. The easiest way is to get the work done well in advance, knowing that you will need to fill in things as they become available. **Remember, you can always send things early since being late is the problem!**

**3. Register for the appropriate testing - almost every university requires SAT I and often SAT II Subject Tests / TOEFL**

Students should plan to give the SAT I at least twice to ensure that they provide the strongest possible result. It is always a good plan to register early for the SAT I or SAT II Subject Tests as the Karachi testing centers get filled up very quickly. Registering for the SAT I must be done online at [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and payment is made by credit card.

Some US universities may even require students to take two SAT II Subject Tests in addition to the SAT. The SAT and SAT subject tests are offered six times during the year in October, November, December, January, May and June. You should prepare for these tests well in advance to ensure that you get the best possible score you can as universities use these scores as indicators of your academic abilities. **Our recommendation is that the first SAT I be taken in January of the A1 year, with a second test in October of the A2 year.** SAT II Subject Tests should be taken in November or December of the A2 year. If necessary, November, December and January of the A2 year can be utilized for additional SAT I or SAT II testing.

Students taking non-Science subjects are usually limited in their ability to fulfill the SAT II requirement and should write directly to the institution requiring the tests for a waiver or to explain why they are unable to meet the requirement.

TOEFL is often required to demonstrate ability in the English Language and may even be required as part of the visa process, although that requirement changes from time to time. Registration for the test is done online at [www.toefl.org](http://www.toefl.org) and paid for by credit card.

Some institutions might accept other English language tests or results of O / A Level examinations. If your results are up to par, you may request a letter from school in support of your request to waive the English Language testing requirement but they do not always work!

Most institutions prefer that test scores be sent directly from the testing agency. Each institution has a unique code that must be entered into the appropriate form to ensure that test reports are delivered accurately. Each test offers some free reports as part of the initial fee but then more reports are available at an additional cost.

**4. Shortlist eight to ten universities where you wish to apply based on criteria that are important to you (location, cost, academics, style, scholarships and more)**

Make lists that rank institutions based on the factors most important to you. Keep a clear focus on what your 'wants' and 'needs' are, if you can. The colleges that rank close to the top of your list are

the ones that you should include in your deliberations. Once you have your initial set of colleges, there probably will be too many, but certainly enough to start your research.

You should have at least 20 - 30 colleges at the top of your list, more might be a challenge to narrow down but it can be done if you are diligent. To develop your initial list, you can use search engines on websites for organizations such as Collegeboard (U.S.A.).

#### Basic questions about your wants and needs

- Are you comfortable with the size of the school? Why?
- Are there social activities and organizations on campus that appeal to you?
- Are fraternities and sororities a big part of campus life?
- Is there racial, socioeconomic, and religious diversity on campus?
- What is the percentage of international students?

#### Financial questions

- Realistically, how much is each school going to cost you? Figure in all expenses: college tuition cost, room and board, books, computer, various living expenses and cost of travel.
- How much financial aid is available? Is this financial aid that you can count on for the entire time you are in school? What about scholarships?
- Do you qualify for financial aid or scholarships based on income, major, academic achievements, athletic prowess, citizenship, etc.
- Is their admissions process need blind, i.e. do they consider whether you have applied for financial aid when they are deciding to offer you admission?
- Is each college worth the price tag? If your first choice costs \$40,000 a year and your second costs \$30,000, is the first choice worth an extra \$40,000 over four years?

#### Academic questions

- Does each college offer the kind of majors that interest you?
- If you have a particular major in mind, how good is that department at each school?
- Find out what the faculty/student ratio is at each school, and what percentage of classes are taught by professors (as opposed to teaching assistants or instructors).
- What is the academic culture like at each school?
- Are students competitive with each other for good grades?
- How academically motivated are other students?
- What is the retention rate of each school? Retention refers to the number of students who leave that school without a degree. A low retention rate is not a good sign.
- What kinds of academic advising and study skills assistance are available to students?

- What job placement and graduate school admissions profile does the college have?

#### Geography questions

- Are you comfortable with the geographic setting of the school (urban campus, small town campus, etc.)?
- What is the climate like? Frigid? Humid? Just right?
- What will it be like to live in the town or area surrounding each college? Fun? Too much fun? Boring? Extremely uncomfortable? A welcome challenge?

Finally, you may find that you still have too large a list to select from. A good number is around ten schools to actually apply to - don't forget that applications run anywhere from thirty to sixty dollars (or more) per school and can become a big expense by themselves. If you still have twenty schools you are thinking about, go back and research some more to eliminate some. Be selective!

**Being realistic about your expected grades will play an enormous role in how accurately you are able to estimate your chance of admission to particular universities. That said, remain hopeful but do not expect to be certain of university admissions offers or of meeting those offers until that actually occurs!**

In order to shortlist universities, use the 3-4-3 approach, i.e., your list should have 3 backup schools, 4 match schools, and 3 reach schools. This approach will allow you to keep your options open and spread your risk. If you apply only to easy or difficult schools, you may regret your options later.

'Reach' colleges: These are the schools where your academic record places you below the college's average admitted student. We generally estimate that a student's chances of admission at a reach school are around 25% or lower. We encourage you to choose a few schools in this category that truly excite you, and then give it your best shot. Remember, though, that more applications to reach colleges do not as a rule generate more acceptances. Put in a strong effort on your application to a few colleges, but do not dilute that effort by spreading yourself thin with applications at a wide span of schools where the odds are not in your favor.

'Match' colleges: You should apply to four mid-range colleges because these are potentially the most appropriate match for you. We classify mid-range schools as places where your chances of admission are around 50%. These are typically colleges where your academic profile puts you in the range of their average student. While your prospects for admission are good, selective colleges are never able to take all the students that fit their "average" academic profile, so never think of these schools as guarantees. The decision will often ride on what you offer beyond academics, the quality of your application effort, and the general competitiveness of the applicants in that particular year. If you apply

to schools primarily in the possible category, you enhance the possibility of receiving several admission letters from schools where you will feel comfortable and yet, challenged academically.

'Backup' colleges: You also need to include at least three colleges where your chances for admission are more likely (75% or better). These are schools where your academic background clearly places you among the top applicants at the college, all but ensuring that a college will admit you for your academic ability alone. You want to have confidence that you will have choices and identifying a few likely schools that you believe match your main criteria, will give you peace of mind as you wait for admission decisions.

#### **5. Common Application vs. direct application**

**Please make sure that you complete all sections of the online Common Application or institutional application form carefully and accurately. Spelling errors and careless form completion can have serious consequences for your admissions review. Also remember that you must provide truthful and accurate information throughout the form. Omissions will also be construed as falsifying responses and can result in negative action or the disqualification of your entire application form. Institutions have proven to be diligent about checking what you enter into the application so be very careful about making any claims that you cannot substantiate as they are likely to be verified.**

The education section requires that you provide details about all your schools (class 9 onwards), O-Level grades by subject, A/S and A-Level grades already received by subject as well as any pending examinations for which grades will be available later. If you are retaking any subject, you must show the original grade and then show that you are repeating the course to ensure that you have provided a complete academic history.

You must list the universities that you are applying to and then remember to check what supplementary forms are required. Almost every university has at least one supplementary form that must be submitted online or mailed to them. Most have multiple forms that include essays and other information. Please do not miss this important step as it will definitely have an impact on the review of your application and may even disqualify you from consideration.

Once you have submitted the form, it is usually sent via email to your counselor and the referee(s) that you have listed on your application. Please ensure that you provide accurate email addresses to ensure that the forms reach the appropriate people. You should also email and personally speak with each person so that they remember to check for the online request from the Common Application.

## **6. Early Decision vs. Early Action vs. Normal**

While this is not a commonly used strategy, it is important to understand that the Early programs are available to all students applying to US institutions and have benefits as well as limitations. Students, parents and counselors should review the information below and, if appropriate, encourage an early application. There are implications for applying early including earlier deadlines, limited financial aid information and more. The College Board provides comprehensive analysis as well as detailed comparisons on early programs (<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/guidance/applications/early>).

### **From The College Board Website:**

#### **Who should apply early?**

Applying to an ED or EA plan is most appropriate for a student who:

- Has researched colleges extensively
- Is absolutely sure that the college he/she is applying to early is a first choice
- Has found a school that is a strong match academically, socially, geographically, etc.
- Meets or exceeds the admission profile for the school for SAT scores, GPA, and class rank
- Has an academic record that has been consistently solid over time

Applying to an ED or EA plan is not appropriate for a student who:

- Has not thoroughly researched and visited colleges
- Is applying early just to avoid stress and paperwork
- Is not fully committed to attending the schools to which he/she is applying
- Is applying early only because friends are
- Needs a strong senior fall semester to bring his/her grades up

#### **The benefits of applying early**

For a student who has a definite first-choice school, applying early has many benefits besides possibly increasing her chance of getting in. Applying early:

- Reduces stress by cutting the time a student spends waiting for a decision
- Saves students the time and expense of submitting multiple applications
- Gives students more time, once accepted, to find housing and prepare for college
- If student is not accepted, having this information gives that student time to reassess options and apply elsewhere



### **The drawbacks of applying early**

- Pressure to decide: Committing to one college puts pressure on students to make serious decisions before they've explored all their options.
- Reduced financial aid opportunities: Students who apply under ED plans receive offers of admission and financial aid simultaneously and so will not be able to compare financial aid offers from other colleges. For students who absolutely need financial aid, applying early may be a risky option.
- Time crunch for other applications: Most colleges do not notify ED/EA applicants of admission until December 15. Because of the usual deadlines for college applications, this means that if a student is rejected by her early-decision college, she will have only two weeks to send in other applications. Encourage those of your students who are applying early to prepare other applications as they wait to hear about admission.
- Senioritis: Applicants who learn early that they have been accepted into a college may feel that, their goal accomplished, they have no reason to work hard for the rest of the year. Early-applying students should know that colleges may rescind offers of admission should their senior-year grades drop.

### **Does applying early increase the chance of acceptance?**

Many students believe applying early means competing with fewer applicants and increasing their chances for acceptance. This is not always true. Schools vary in the proportion of the class admitted early and in the percentage of early applicants they admit.

Higher admission rates for ED applicants may correlate to stronger profiles among candidates choosing ED. Students should ask the admissions office whether their institution's admissions standards differ between ED and regular applicants, and then assess whether applying early makes sense given their own profile.

If you find a college that you're sure is right for you, consider applying early. Early decision and early action plans allow you to apply early (usually in November) and get an admission decision from the college well before the usual spring notification date. You know by December or January whether you've been accepted at your first-choice college.

Sometimes, students who apply under these plans have a better chance of acceptance than they would through the regular admission process. These plans are also good for colleges because they get students who really want to go to the college to commit early in the process.

## Early Decision vs. Early Action

You should understand the differences between early decision and early action before sending in your applications. Keep in mind that the rules may vary somewhat by college. Check with your counselor to make sure you understand your rights and obligations. Below are some important facts about the types of early-application plan.

Early decision plans are binding. You agree to attend the college if it accepts you and offers an adequate financial aid package. Although you can apply to only one college for early decision, you may apply to other colleges through the regular admission process. If you're accepted by your first-choice college early, you must withdraw all other applications.

Early action plans are similar to early decision plans, but are not binding. If you've been accepted, you can choose to commit to the college immediately, or wait until the spring. Under these plans, you may also apply early action to other colleges. Usually, you have until the late spring to let the college know your decision.

Single-choice early action is a new option offered by a few colleges. This plan works the same way as other early action plans, but candidates may not apply early (either early action or early decision) to any other college. You can still apply to other colleges under regular decision plans and are not required to give your final answer to the early-application college until the regular decision deadline.

<b>Application Type</b>	<b>Binding</b>	<b>Can Apply Early to Other Colleges</b>	<b>Can Apply to Other Colleges Under Regular Admission</b>
Early Decision	Yes	No	Yes
Early Action	No	Yes	Yes
Single Choice Early Action	No	No	Yes

## Should I Apply Under One of These Plans?

You should apply under an early decision or early action plan only if you are very sure of the college you want to attend. Do not apply under an early decision or early action plan if you plan to weigh offers and financial aid packages from several colleges later in the spring. Also, you shouldn't apply early if it would be beneficial to have more of your senior year work to show a college.

## Which Colleges Offer Early Plans?

More than 400 colleges offer an early decision plan, an early action plan, or both. Use our College Search to look up each college you're interested in and see if it offers these options. You can also find this information in the College Handbook.

## **A Last Word of Advice**

In the fall, it may seem appealing to get the college decision over with, but you may want to keep your options open during senior year as you learn more about colleges and your own preferences. On the other hand, you may be confident that you'll thrive at a certain college. If so, you're the type of student early decision was created for.

## **7. Recommendations and supporting documents**

Requesting supporting documents such as transcripts and recommendations must be done on time. Most USA institutions require a complete academic record from Grade 9 onwards. It is important that your most recent transcripts show academic strength as they are more likely to be the focus of any admissions review.

Do not include too many certificates or awards because they will simply clutter your file and not add much to the admissions decision. Choose two or three important accomplishments and highlight them for the admissions committee. These are more likely to get noticed and appreciated compared to a stack of certificates that nobody will bother to go through.

Your references should be complete and reflect your accomplishments as well as your future potential. It is important that you make your referee(s) aware of anything that is important to highlight in your recommendation. Again, do not give them long lists of things because it will not help them choose what to include and what to leave out. Pick the important things and give them the easy task of incorporating these accomplishments into their own words.

Also, ensure that you meet all documentation deadlines for having your reference written by your counselor or teacher so that there are no problems when the time comes to send your application. Remember, if you are late and there is limited time, your reference is likely to be written in a hurry and your referee is likely to be less than happy with you while writing on your behalf, neither of which is good for you!

## **8. Essays and Personal Statements**

All personal statements and essays are reviewed for plagiarism and it is in your best interests to follow the simple guidelines provided by each institution when writing yours. Essays are your opportunity to speak to the universities about your strengths as a person and a student; why you have chosen a particular educational path; how your educational choices fit into future career plans; to highlight any major accomplishments or to answer specific questions posed by the institution. **DO** **NOT** use this as a chance to provide a laundry list of activities or fill it with large words. The best

essays are simple, direct and informative while highlighting a few things that distinguish you from the thousands of other applications that they will be reading. So it is best to be selective in what you put forward so that the person reviewing your application can focus on what is special about you and why you deserve a chance to attend that university.

## **9. Financial Aid forms and other finance related documents**

Most institutions require a Certification of Finances from International Students. Each institution may have its own version of the form or use one provided by The College Board ([http://www.cooper.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/2014\\_2015\\_International\\_Student\\_Certification\\_of\\_Finances\\_Guidelines%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.cooper.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/2014_2015_International_Student_Certification_of_Finances_Guidelines%20(1).pdf)). Normally your university should provide the required form, if your university does not provide a form, you may use the College Board form to provide evidence that you can pay for your education.

If you plan to apply for financial aid, the forms that you use depend on your citizenship. For US citizens and permanent residents, the application is submitted online through the FAFSA website (<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>). Complete information on the FAFSA process as well as detailed instructions are available on the website. Once you complete the form and submit it online, you will receive an analysis of your family finances, as will the institutions you list as recipients of your FAFSA. It is up to each individual institution to determine your family's ability to pay, the amount of financial assistance required as well as what financial aid (if any) they will offer you.

For non-US citizens, if financial aid is available, institutions will probably provide their own form. College Board also provides a financial aid application called the CSS/Financial Aid PROFILE (<http://student.collegeboard.org/css-financial-aid-profile>). The PROFILE application enables you to apply to multiple universities for aid. You must check which universities accept the PROFILE: (<https://profileonline.collegeboard.org/prf/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet.srv>)

You must complete the form accurately and provide any required documentation. Once again, do not provide any inaccurate or fake documents as they can have a negative impact on admissions and the visa process. Omitting information or documents is equivalent to misrepresenting facts and is treated in the same manner. Verification is a certainty and almost every institution will make you sign an affidavit stating that the forms and supporting documents are genuine. The penalty for a violation usually removal from the institution, regardless of the timing of the discovery which means it can happen even after enrolment.

There are two types of financial aid:

- **Need based:** grant money, loans, and work study awarded based on your family's financial situation and the feasibility of paying for college.

- **Merit based:** scholarships awarded for academic and extracurricular accomplishments.

Universities that offer need based aid are also of two types:

- **Need blind:** colleges that are need-blind make admission decisions without regard for the financial situation of the applicant's family. The admission process is separate from the financial aid process. Your admission decision is based on your merit, while your financial aid is determined by your family's financial need.
- **Need aware:** colleges that are need-aware may make admission decisions with some consideration of the family's financial situation. Financial aid decisions may also take into account the strength of the student (i.e., a stronger applicant may be awarded a better financial aid package than a weaker applicant). Applying for financial aid to such universities will also reduce your chances of admission.

## **10. Admissions Decisions and Responses**

Hopefully you will have a number of university choices when the final admissions decisions are published. At this time, you will have to compare the options available in the context of all the factors that you considered when you selected your initial set of universities. Working with your family and counselor, you should analyze all aspects of the available choices and make your best decision. Make sure that your analysis is realistic and not based on whims or unsubstantiated information. Do not hesitate to research the institutions further or contact the admissions office (or others) for additional information before your final decision. This is one of the most important decisions of your life and you must give it the appropriate time and respect to ensure that you make the best one!

Once you've been offered admission, make sure you accept the offer of admission by the deadline. You will be required to pay a deposit in order to hold a spot. Most enrollment deposits are non-refundable. You should also contact the student housing office to begin the process of college housing and explore available options. Make sure you receive all necessary information from your chosen school with instructions for registering for the first semester classes, dorm move-in dates and procedures, orientation, meal plans, and other details.

## **11. Once your university choice is finalized, begin the U.S.A. visa process**

There are many steps to follow when you are applying for your U.S.A. visa. The best resource for information is [http://islamabad.usembassy.gov/pakistan/niv\\_student\\_visas.html](http://islamabad.usembassy.gov/pakistan/niv_student_visas.html) The US Embassy in Islamabad provides extensive information about the visa process, English language testing, documentation requirements, eligible courses and universities.

You will need an I-20 form from your university in order to begin the visa process. Once you are accepted and make your decision about which university to attend, you should contact them about the

requirements to receive an I-20. Often you will have to submit additional documents, and possibly even pay part or all of the required tuition fees, to obtain the I-20.

**From the US Embassy website:**

There are two types of Student Visas:

**Academic studies (F-1 visa):** For people who want to study or conduct research at an accredited U.S. college or university.

**Non-Academic or Vocational Studies (M-1 Visa):** For people who want to study or train at a non-academic institution in the U.S.

Apply for your student visa as soon as you have completed your preparation to study in the United States. Administrative processing requirements after the visa interview may increase the amount of time a successful applicant will wait before receiving a visa. Therefore, students should plan accordingly and are advised to apply **at least 120 days** before the school start date listed on the I-20 form. Continuing students may apply for a new visa at any time, as long as they have been maintaining student status and their SEVIS number is valid.

1. Complete the DS-160 nonimmigrant visa application (<https://ceac.state.gov/genniv/>) (Please read the following instructions before filling out the DS-160.)
  - a. You may upload a photo to the application. If you do not, please submit a photo with your one-page confirmation sheet.
  - b. It is useful to have all required information readily available as you fill out the form. This includes the following:
    - i. Current contact information;
    - ii. Travel plans including U.S. contact information and who will pay for the trip;
    - iii. Prior U.S. visa applications;
    - iv. Prior U.S. travel;
    - v. Information about immediate relatives (including parents, spouse and children);
    - vi. Current and previous work, education, and training information; and
    - vii. Additional information as required for certain visa classes (i.e. SEVIS ID for F and J visa applicants, required information for E1 and E2 applications).
  - c. As you complete the visa application, save a copy on your hard drive and click 'save' often.
  - d. Fill out all required information completely and correctly, including selecting the appropriate visa type. Please note: Your application may be rejected prior to or at the time of your interview if you select the wrong visa type or submit erroneous or incomplete information. This would require you to complete the entire application again and to reschedule a visa interview.

- e. Review all information. Click "submit" only when you are completely finished filling out the application. After you click "submit" you cannot make any further changes to the application.
  - f. Print the confirmation page.
2. Go to an American Express Bank Ltd Travel Related Services office, a participating branch of American Express, or Speedex in Pakistan:

**Karachi**

U.S. Visa Services Centre  
Ground Floor  
Shaheen Commercial Complex  
Dr. Ziauddin Ahmed Road  
Tel: (021) 263-0260 (20 Lines)  
UAN: (021) 111-786-111

- a. Pay the application fee of US\$160 or Pakistani Rupee equivalent.
  - b. Submit the following:
    - i. The one-page confirmation form (with legible barcode) from the DS-160
    - ii. A current photo (within the last 6 months) measuring 2" x 2" with white background  
**(Please ensure your photo has not been retouched or altered, otherwise your photo will not be accepted.)**
    - iii. A photocopy of applicant's passport valid for at least 6 months beyond the planned date of entry to the U.S.
    - iv. Copy of I-20 form with name and date of birth matching passport details
    - v. \$200 SEVIS fee receipt (paid online at <http://www.fmjfee.com/>)
3. On the day of the scheduled interview applicants must arrive at the Diplomatic Shuttle Service, 3rd Avenue, near Quaid-e-Azam University Road, G-5, Islamabad to board the shuttle to the U.S. Embassy 30 minutes before their interview appointment. Applicants who arrive at the Diplomatic Shuttle Service more than 30 minutes before their interview may be asked to wait at the Diplomatic Shuttle Service.

Successful applicants will receive their passport and visa from the American Express branch where they submitted their application. Other applicants will have their passports returned following the interview.

**The Visa Interview**

Students should bring all their application documents to the Embassy on the day of their interview. In addition, they should be prepared to provide the following documents during the interview:

- Transcripts and diplomas from previous institutions attended, and scores from any standardized tests required by the educational institution, such as SAT, TOEFL, GRE, GMAT, etc.
- Financial evidence that the student has funds immediately available to cover the first year of tuition and living expenses, and evidence of funds for all subsequent years
- For post-grad students: CV with current projects, publications, educational history, and prior employment, plus proposed research plan with names of faculty sponsors

Students with dependents must also provide proof of the student's relationship to his/her spouse and/or children (e.g., marriage and birth certificates.) It is preferred that families apply for F-1 and F-2 visas at the same time, but if the spouse and children must apply separately at a later time, they should bring a copy of the student visa holder's passport and visa, along with all other required documents.

### **Eligibility**

While recent changes in visa issuance procedures have increased the time it takes to receive a visa, the standards for eligibility remain the same. Students who have been accepted at a U.S. school and are able to pay the full costs of their study are eligible to apply for a student visa. **However, acceptance at a school in the U.S. does not ensure that an applicant will be qualified for a visa.**

To qualify for a student visa, a student must demonstrate their qualifications as a student and the seriousness of their course of study in the US. Applicants should be prepared to discuss their reasons for studying in the United States and the details of their intended studies. Just as applicants for Visitor Visas, students must also establish that they are not intending immigrants to the United States.

**Caution:** By submitting the visa application form you are certifying that all the information contained in it is true and correct. If you misrepresent any facts, you could be barred from entering the United States for life. Please double-check that your answers are accurate and that every question is answered completely.

### **Photograph Requirements**

Your photo is a vital part of your visa application. To learn more, review the information below on how to provide a suitable photo. Digital images are required for some visa categories, while photos are required for other visa categories. The acceptance of your digital image or photo is at the discretion of the U.S. embassy or consulate where you apply. We recommend you use a professional visa photo service to ensure your photo meets all the requirements.



Your photos or digital images must be:

- In color
- Sized such that the head is between 1 inch and 1 3/8 inches (22 mm and 35 mm) or 50% and 69% of the image's total height from the bottom of the chin to the top of the head. View the Photo Composition Template for more size requirement details.
- Taken within the last 6 months to reflect your current appearance
- Taken in front of a plain white or off-white background
- Taken in full-face view directly facing the camera
- With a neutral facial expression and both eyes open
- Taken in clothing that you normally wear on a daily basis
- Uniforms should not be worn in your photo, except religious clothing that is worn daily.
- Do not wear a hat or head covering that obscures the hair or hairline, unless worn daily for a religious purpose. Your full face must be visible, and the head covering must not cast any shadows on your face.
- Headphones, wireless hands-free devices, or similar items are not acceptable in your photo.
- If you normally wear glasses (without tinted lenses), a hearing device, or similar articles, they may be worn in your photo.
- Dark glasses or glasses with tinted lenses are not acceptable.
- Glare on glasses is not acceptable in your photo. Glare can be avoided with a slight downward tilt of the glasses or by removing the glasses or by turning off the camera flash.

Review the Photo Examples to see examples of acceptable and unacceptable photos. Photos copied or digitally scanned from driver's licenses or other official documents are not acceptable. In addition, snapshots, magazine photos, low quality vending machine or mobile phone photos, and full-length photographs are not acceptable.

#### **Additional Requirements for Nonimmigrant Visas Applicants using Form DS-160**

If you are applying for a nonimmigrant visa by filling out the DS-160 online form, you must upload your digital image as part of completing the online visa application form. Review the Digital Image Requirements, which also provide additional requirements if you are scanning an existing photo.

#### **Entering the United States**

Please note that students may not enter the U.S. on an F-1 visa more than 30 days prior to the start date listed on the I-20 form. Continuing students may enter the U.S. at any time before their classes start. For more information on what to expect at the port of entry in the United States, please read the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Student and Exchange Visitor Program Fact Sheet.

## **12. Get ready for university**

Apart from your parents, friends and counselors, there are several online resources available to guide you through the process of getting ready for university. Some useful things to remember are:

- Obtain complete information about your responsibilities
- Make sure that you meet all required deadlines
- Be diligent and resourceful
- Pay attention to every detail, read the fine print. Before you sign anything or make a commitment, make sure you read it and discuss it with your parents
- Spend carefully, always keeping your budget in mind
- Remember cultural norms for your new country, things are likely to be very different from what you might be familiar with
- Be knowledgeable about changes in laws and societal expectations
- Know your rights as a student and individual within the university and beyond
- Be sure to know the location and contact information for your embassy in case you should ever need assistance from them
- Develop strong relationships with the International Student Office at your university
- Get familiar with your surroundings at university and the local area
- Find people who can be mentors and guides throughout your university years
- You will meet lots of new people and the important thing is to be open and friendly, while using good judgment about your associations
- Enjoy university but never lose sight of your primary purpose, i.e. to succeed at obtaining the best education possible
- Adjustment to the freedom of university is one of the biggest initial lessons you will learn so manage your time wisely and set your priorities well

Before you start at a university or college you need to make sure you have everything ready, such as accommodation, finances, travel arrangements, books and equipment required for the course. Most universities provide guidance to help you prepare for higher education and advice on where you can find further support.

Good Luck!