

STEP 1: RESEARCH YOUR OPTIONS

With nearly 5,000 colleges and universities across all 50 states, how do you choose which schools are right for you? The first step to studying in the U.S. is to research your options to find the school that best fits your needs.

Typically, researching your options begins 12 to 18 months prior to your target start date. It is important to define your priorities first to guide your research. Start by answering these basic questions:

- Why do you want to study in the United States?
- What type of environment do you feel will you fit in best?
- Will you need financial assistance?
- What are the application and financial aid deadlines?
- Where do you want to live in the United States?

Narrowing Down Your College Search

With such a wide variety of options, how exactly should you narrow down your college search? There are many factors to consider when doing your research. Check out a few of our suggestions!

- **Type of School:** Two-year or four-year? Public or private? Big, medium, or small? Read more here: <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/find-colleges/college-101/types-of-colleges-the-basics>.
- **Accreditation:** The schools you apply to must be certified by the Student Exchange Visitor Program. Otherwise, you will not be able to apply for a student visa. Learn more here: <https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/school-search>.
- **Selectivity and Competitiveness:** Some schools have lower acceptance rates than others, which means that admission can be more competitive. Check requirements like standardized test scores, GPA, coursework, etc.
- **Programs and Majors Offered:** Although it is possible to apply to U.S. colleges and universities without declaring a specific major, it will benefit you more to have at least an idea of your intended degree or program. This will help you narrow down schools you will be applying to.
- **Cost and Financial Aid:** This may be the second step on the 5 Steps to U.S. Study, but if you know that you want to apply for a scholarship, make sure the schools you choose offer financial aid for international students.
- **Location:** There are so many states to choose from! Do you want to stay in a busy city or somewhere more laid back? Do you want to experience four seasons or do you prefer more tropical weather? Do you want to stay where you have family or where there's a larger Filipino community?



- **Student Life and Opportunities:** An American education is not only about academics; U.S. colleges and universities value wholistic education. Consider checking out study abroad programs, internships, co-op programs (earn credit AND money!), sports, etc.
- **Housing:** There are many types of accommodation to choose from. Most universities have on-campus dormitories, but you may also opt to live off-campus at an apartment or homestay. If you have relatives you can live with, that will save you a lot of money!

TIP # 1: You shouldn't try to match yourself to the school, but rather find the school that matches you and your priorities and long-term goals.

TIP # 2: Remember that no official ranking system exists for colleges and universities in the United States. The best college or university is the one that is best for you and meets your requirements—academic, financial, and personal.

TIP # 3: You can ask schools for more information! Colleges and universities regularly schedule information sessions to give interested applicants the opportunity to meet faculty, staff, and students of the school. You may also reach out to the admissions office to set up a call with a counsellor.

Building Your School List

Students who thoughtfully curate a balanced list of schools tend to have a less stressful application process than those who apply to dozens. Applying to a range of schools will ensure that you set ambitious goals and give yourself some back-up options which you are also happy with.

Reach Schools	Target Schools	Safety Schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If getting in and paying for college weren't issues, where would you want to attend? • Your DREAM school! • Be realistic! Reach schools may be long shots, but it should still be possible for you to get accepted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools where your academic credentials fall within the average range of students accepted the previous year. • Highly achievable based on your own academic performance. • Remember, there are no guarantees! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools where your academic credentials exceed the range for the average first year student. • These should also be schools you'd be happy to attend. • Be sure your family can afford these schools or that these schools offer financial aid for international students.



College Search Websites

Here are some helpful tools you can use to filter out your school options. There are many others, but these should get you started.

1. <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>
2. <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>
3. <https://www.petersons.com/>

Standardized Test Resources

Many schools will require or recommend you to submit standardized test scores. Here are the most common ones:

1. SAT - <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>
 - a. SAT Subject Tests - <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat-subject-tests>
 - b. AP Tests - <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/>
2. ACT - <http://www.act.org/>
3. English Language Proficiency Tests
 - a. TOEFL (American English) - <https://www.ets.org/toefl>
 - b. IELTS (British English) - <https://www.ielts.org/>
 - c. Duolingo - <https://englishtest.duolingo.com/edu>

If you feel that test-taking is not your strong suit, you may want to apply to test-optional schools. Visit <http://www.fairtest.org/> to learn more.

To learn more about **Researching Your Options**,
visit <https://educationusa.state.gov/your-5-steps-us-study/research-your-options>.

