



## **UNIVERSITY APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

***Created by the Educational Advising Center in Almaty, Kazakhstan***

When applying to universities, it is important to present the application in the best light possible. In addition to listing academic and personal achievements, it is a tool of persuasion, which students can use to promote themselves as ideal candidates for a program.

The success of the application depends on the ability of the student to demonstrate strengths, creativity, and individuality. It is important to describe skills and accomplishments as well as academic interests.

**Preparing an application package requires time and effort. Do not leave it until the last minute. Start the process in early September to meet the winter deadline for submitting the documents.**

Make sure that the application package contains ALL the documents and information required by the university admissions office. An incomplete application will not be considered until all missing documents are sent. This means that time may be lost, and places and scholarships may have been allocated by the time all material is sent.

Students should make a checklist before sending in their application. Many applications require the following:

- Cover letter
- Completed application form
- Transcripts and diplomas - in original language and an English (or host university language) translation
- Letters of recommendation
- Statement of Purpose
- Current Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Application fee, if applicable
- Test scores: students waiting for TOEFL or GRE results must indicate in their cover letter that the results will be mailed later (or, "sent under separate cover")

**Selection of the college/university.** Many foreign students miss opportunities for acceptance at institutions of their choice or chances for financial aid simply because they do not allow enough time for the application process. The process of entering higher education in the United States requires at least a year or a year-and-a-half if you are applying to selective institutions or requesting financial aid. Selection, application and testing may each require several months. Travel arrangements and visa application can also be time-consuming.

Selecting a working group of 10 to 15 institutions from the more than 3,000 available in the United States is a challenging task. Although so much variety can be bewildering, it has a positive side as well. With so many institutions to choose from, it is almost always possible to find one or more institutions that meet your academic and financial needs and offer an environment in which you will be comfortable. Do not leave this important decision to a friend or relative, or choose only from the most famous institutions. There may be other institutions more appropriate to your goals and requirements.

Once you have located a suitable group of institutions that offer your field of study, compare them systematically. Look at the differences between them with respect to:

- Your chosen field of study,
- Degree level,
- Type of institution,
- Location,
- Size,
- International students enrollment
- Housing,
- Cost,
- Availability of financial aid,
- Ease of admission,
- Deadline
- Quality, approach to technology,
- Availability of English as a second language programs, and
- International Student Services Office.

The most important factors in selection are availability of your chosen field of study and high quality of instruction in that field. One good strategy is to choose a region of the United States that you prefer and then locate institutions within that region that offer your field of study. Educational advisers can assist in interpreting the differences between institutions. In addition, advisers are aware of the error of applying only to famous, internationally known institutions. They can suggest additional accredited colleges, universities, community colleges or technical schools that best fit your goals, finances and tastes. They are also aware of host-country regulations and educational equivalencies in various fields.

Use catalogs at your local advising center (a complete and current set may be available on microfiche), brochures and other publications to investigate the entire range of possibilities. Using a worksheet makes it easy to eliminate institutions that are too expensive, that do not meet your individual needs, or that have admissions requirements that are too high or too low. Gather as much data as possible about specific programs and institutions through research at the advising center and through correspondence.

Another alternative is to use computerized college search programs found in some advising centers. These programs-for which a fee may be charged-can compare programs and institutions quickly, with respect to your needs and preferences.

**Writing an inquiry letter.** After selecting a group of 10 to 15 institutions that seem most appropriate, write to at least 10 of them for information and application materials. Always use the same spelling of your name, from the first inquiry through the entire application process. This is especially important if your name is transliterated from some other language into English.

To request information and application materials write a letter by regular mail or e-mail. The samples of the letters go further. In a month or so you will receive the required materials.

**Tests registration (TOEFL, SAT, GRE, GMAT).** To complete academic study or technical training in the United States successfully, you will need to be able to read, write and communicate orally in English with a high degree of proficiency. English language proficiency is a requirement for gaining admission to U.S. institutions of higher education as well as for achieving your academic and personal goals while in the United States. Register for the tests early in a local ACTR/ACCELS office. For details about all above exams, please, refer to a separate section of this manual.

### **Elements of an application**

#### ***1) The Cover Letter:***

The cover letter introduces the applicant and lists the documents that are in the package. The letter should also contain the correct name and address of the student and the correct name and address of the person to receive the application. Remember to include your e-mail address as well. If documents are missing, this is the opportunity to explain why. The cover letter should always be typed.

#### ***2) A completed application form:***

Type or print the application. Minimize the number of corrections, smudges and deletions. Do not leave questions unanswered. If the question does not apply, write "n/a" (not applicable).

#### ***3) Transcripts and Diplomas***

Transcripts, undergraduate and graduate (if applicable) must be sent with the application. Transcripts that are not in English (or host university's language) must be officially translated. Students must send copies in their home language as well as translated copies.

#### ***4) Letters of Recommendation***

Strong letters of recommendation can greatly increase one's chances of being accepted to university. Therefore, it is important to consider carefully who will write the letters. Who will provide the most positive recommendation? Who will write the fairest letter? How long has the professor known the student?

Writing recommendation letters for students is a very time consuming task. It should be looked upon as a favor that faculty offer for students. It should not be expected. Faculty always reserves the right to refuse. Thus, it is important to ask courteously and give the professor time to prepare the letter.

Letters should be in a sealed envelope that is signed on the back by the faculty member. (Universities will not always consider letters presented in an unsealed envelope). Students should always provide faculty with details of the program to which they are applying and the name of the university and the department.

Faculty may choose to return the letter to the student or send it to the university themselves. In this case, students must provide faculty with the exact address. However, try to send the letters of recommendation with the application package. If this is not

possible, the cover letter sent with the application package must explain the estimated time of arrival of the letters and details of who is sending them.

### ***5) Application Fees***

Most universities in the US (and some in other parts of the world) require students to pay an application fee. These fees usually range from \$20 - \$80.

Some universities will waive the application fee upon request by the student. Students who are applying to a number of universities may want to consider asking for these application fee waivers. However, some universities do not look favorably on students requesting application fee waivers since it can imply that the student may not have sufficient funds to cover the larger tuition and living costs. It is advisable to budget carefully to pay for extra application fees.

### ***6) Statement of Purpose***

University applications usually include an essay section in the application. This section is approximately phrased with the following sentence: "Please explain why the program is suitable for you and your topic of research". It is called the "Statement of Purpose" and is one of the most important documents in an application. The Statement of Purpose allows a student to highlight and emphasize individual achievements, goals and objectives for the future. It distinguishes one student from another and is one of the deciding factors for admission in an application package. Universities want to select motivated and bright students. The selection of the right graduate students is important for the faculty and the long-term reputation of the department and university.

The Statement of Purpose gives the student the opportunity to be remembered by the Admissions Office out of thousands of applications. It should not be duplicated from one application to another but adapted for each application. A Statement of Purpose is not necessarily a research proposal.

There is a special section in this manual devoted to Statement of Purpose.

### ***7) Final Suggestions***

Send the application and all documents in a large envelope. Send the application by registered airmail. Always keep copies of application materials. Send applications in well before the deadline. Applications sent afterwards will not be considered. Budget for photocopying, test, and postage costs.

### **Looking for funding**

When applying to universities, it is important to look for funding at the same time. Applicants requiring financial assistance to cover costs of further studies must plan on spending as much time on looking and applying for funds as on the admissions process.

Realistically, one or even two months are not long enough to search for funding. Many applications are rejected because they are incomplete and inadequately prepared. To be successful, you must begin the process early and invest time in applying properly!

Financial assistance for further study, whether it is from a university, foundation or corporation is extremely limited; applicants are numerous. Few sources of financial assistance cover all expenses. Prospective students should apply to more than one source. E.g., the Soros Supplementary Grants Program provides students with partial funding only. Students must secure the remaining costs.

Students should always obtain accurate estimates of expenses from the universities they wish to enter. If ranges of costs are given, use the higher figure for planning purposes. Students cannot begin their further study without having all the costs covered.

**Sources of funding:** Financial Aid application: Universities offer financial aid on the basis of merit, need or both. In all cases, consideration is given to academic achievements, ability, commitment and motivation. The research proposal and study plan are vital documents to include. Financial aid application deadlines may be as early as a year before enrollment. Therefore, check in the prospectus for details on how to apply. The application process may involve:

- Completion of an application form
- Transcripts
- Interviews
- Notification of acceptance from the university

It is always important to include a cover letter with any application for financial aid.

Some financial aid awards are taxable. This may reduce the amount of the grant. Students should check the tax status of financial aid awards before accepting them.

**Tuition waiver:** A decision from a university to cover part or all tuition expenses on behalf of the student.

**Fellowships and grants:** These are financial aid possibilities, which have a formal application procedure and a deadline. They may cover tuition or living expenses. They do not have to be paid back.

**Research and Teaching assistantships:** They require an average of 10 to 20 hours per week of work. Research Assistantships require assisting a professor or research group. Teaching assistantships involve tasks within a department such as marking assignments, teaching sections of classes, helping students, etc. These posts are advertised throughout the year and PhD students are encouraged to apply on a competitive basis.

It is worth investigating opportunities offered by the following:

**The Embassy** of the country where one is planning to study may have scholarship information, addresses and contact names of pertinent organizations such as Immigrant Societies through out the world. These societies could be an excellent resource for finding funds or for providing a network of fellow nationals. **Businesses and corporations** may offer scholarship, internship or career opportunities. They may provide funds in return for a commitment of employment. **Personal or Family Funds.** Every year, some of our scholarship students are able to continue onto further study because they had access to family funds. Please consider personal savings as a possibility.

**College/university acceptance.** Several months will pass while institutions review applications. During this period, test scores, letters of recommendation and other documents arrive, and the admissions file is finally completed. Consult the advising center if you encounter difficulties such as inability to obtain particular documents.

Many institutions review all completed applications at the same time and issue acceptances between March and May. Some institutions have rolling admissions; that is, they continue to accept applications throughout the academic year. The advantage of this for a foreign student is that delays often caused by long distances are less serious; acceptance may still be possible as late as June or even July before the academic year begins in September.

If you are accepted by an institution, you will receive a letter of admission and the form you need to apply for a visa, the "Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant F-I Status," Form 1-20 A-B.

The letter of admission will probably ask that you make a decision within a specified period. You may also be requested to confirm your intention to enroll by sending in a deposit of \$50 to \$ 100. If you accept, write a letter to the admissions officer, stating your intention to enroll. Fill out and return any additional forms by airmail. If university-sponsored housing applications are included, process them as soon as possible, and return them by airmail with a check or money order for any deposit that may be required.

**Apply for Student visa.** Consult the consular section at the nearest United States embassy or consulate as early as possible to determine the specific procedures and documents necessary to apply for a non-immigrant (F-1) student visa. These may differ from country to country. Below are the usual requirements:

- Passport, valid for at least six months after the date you plan to leave;
- Visa application form;
- A photograph, 5 cm by 5 cm;
- Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant F-1 Student Status (Form 1-20 A-B);
- Affidavit of financial support form and evidence of support;
- Evidence of English language ability; and
- Any other documents of local importance.

There is a special section in this manual devoted to Visa procedures and regulations.

### **Very useful sources about studying in US:**

BECA, Educational Information and Resources  
[exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa](http://exchanges.state.gov/education/educationusa)  
New 2 USA.com [www.new2usa.com](http://www.new2usa.com)  
Education Connect.com [www.educationconnect.com/](http://www.educationconnect.com/)  
EDU Pass.com The SmartStudent Guide to Studying in the US [www.edupass.org/](http://www.edupass.org/)  
CollegeXpress [www.collegexpress.com](http://www.collegexpress.com)  
CollegeNET Online College Applications and Free Financial Aid Search  
[www.collegenet.com/](http://www.collegenet.com/)  
CollegeView: College Search, Financial Aid and Scholarships at  
[www.collegeview.com/](http://www.collegeview.com/)  
Embark: Research Schools, Apply Online, etc. [www.embark.com/](http://www.embark.com/)  
CHEA web: Council for Higher Education and Accreditation [www.chea.org/](http://www.chea.org/)  
The Princeton Review web at [www.review.com/](http://www.review.com/)  
College and University Ranking, Illinois State University web at  
[www.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankings.htm](http://www.library.uiuc.edu/edx/rankings.htm)  
Common Application.com at [www.commonapp.org/](http://www.commonapp.org/)

### **Useful web-sources for those looking for financial aid:**

Financial Aid [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)  
The College Board's Financial Aid Services  
[www.collegeboard.org/finaid/fastud/html/intro.html](http://www.collegeboard.org/finaid/fastud/html/intro.html)  
AccessAmerica [www.students.org](http://www.students.org)  
College is Possible [www.collegeispossible.org](http://www.collegeispossible.org)  
FastWeb's Parents Page  
[www.fastweb.com/fastweb/content/parents/index.ptml](http://www.fastweb.com/fastweb/content/parents/index.ptml)  
Wired Scholar [www.wiredscholar.com](http://www.wiredscholar.com)  
Mapping Your Future [www.mapping-your-future.org/paying](http://www.mapping-your-future.org/paying)  
Soc.college.financial-aid [Soc.college.financial-aid](http://Soc.college.financial-aid)  
FAFSA on the Web [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)  
FastWeb [www.fastWeb.com](http://www.fastWeb.com)  
FreSch: he Free Scholarship Search Service [www.freschinfo.com](http://www.freschinfo.com)

CASHE for Your Education	<a href="http://www.cashe.com">www.cashe.com</a>
ExPAN Scholarship Search	<a href="http://www.collegeboard.org/fundfinder/html/ssrchtop.html">www.collegeboard.org/fundfinder/html/ssrchtop.html</a>
MACH25	<a href="http://www.collegenet.com/mach25">www.collegenet.com/mach25</a>
College Planning	<a href="http://www.collegeplan.org/cpnow/pnwguide/pnwguide.htm">www.collegeplan.org/cpnow/pnwguide/pnwguide.htm</a>
The Scholarship Research Network	<a href="http://www.srnexpress.com">www.srnexpress.com</a>
The Foundation Center	<a href="http://www.fdncenter.org/funders">www.fdncenter.org/funders</a>
Win Scholarship	<a href="http://www.winscholarship.com">www.winscholarship.com</a>
Arkansas Scholarship Information Service	<a href="http://scholarships-ar-us.org/">http://scholarships-ar-us.org/</a>
Free for you	<a href="http://www.free-4u.com">www.free-4u.com</a>
IEFA web-site	<a href="http://www.iefaf.org">www.iefaf.org</a>
The Scholarship Page	<a href="http://www.scholarship-page.com">www.scholarship-page.com</a>
Planning and Paying for School: Scholarships	
<a href="http://www.salliemae.com/planning/scholarships.html">www.salliemae.com/planning/scholarships.html</a>	

**SAMPLE COVER LETTER I: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

Name  
University  
XXX Department  
Address  
e-mail address  
telephone number

University XXX  
Department YYY  
Address ZZZ  
Country

Date

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am currently enrolled as an <undergraduate> OR <graduate> student in <<department>> at <<University>> in <<Country>>.

I am interested in pursuing <graduate> studies at your university in <<subject>>. Please send a prospectus, departmental brochure for the <<name of department>>, an application form, information on application procedures for international students and research possibilities and scholarship details.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely

(sign name)

Name

**SAMPLE COVER LETTER II: REQUEST FOR INFORMATION**

Name  
University  
XXX Department  
Address  
e-mail address  
telephone number

University XXX  
Department YYY  
Address ZZZ  
Country

Date

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am currently enrolled in a Doctoral (PhD) Program in <<department>> at <<University>> in <Country>.

I am looking for an opportunity to conduct doctoral research in <<subject>> for a period of <<# - # months>>at your university/institute. Please send me a prospectus, departmental brochure for the <<name of department>>, an application form and any additional information necessary to arrange a stay as a visiting researcher.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely

(sign name)

Name

**SAMPLE COVER LETTER III: COVER LETTER TO BE SENT WITH APPLICATION PACKAGES**

Name  
University  
XXX Department  
Address  
e-mail address  
telephone number

University XXX  
Department YYY  
Address ZZZ  
Country

Date

Dear Madam/Sir

Enclosed, please find my application to <<name of university>>, department of <<name of department>> for the 2000-2001 Academic Year. I am currently enrolled as an <undergraduate> OR <graduate> student at <University>, <<name of department >> in <<Country>>.

This package includes:  
(list all items)

The following documents will be mailed to you under separate cover as soon as they become available.  
(please list the item only if it is applicable)

TOEFL scores <<give test date>>  
GRE scores <<give test date>>  
Other scores <<where applicable>>  
Letters of Recommendation <<Give names and addresses>>

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at the address below. I will be at this address until <<date>>.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely,

(sign here)

Name

**SAMPLE LETTER IV: REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL AID.** To be sent after the application has been sent. Please send to appropriate office within the university. Research the correct procedure before sending a letter requesting financial aid, as some universities will have already sent this information with the application form.

Name  
University  
XXX Department  
Address  
e-mail  
telephone number

University XXX  
Financial Aid/Scholarship Office YYY  
Address ZZZ  
Country

Date

Dear Madam/Sir

I have applied to the <<program >> in the Department of <<name>>. I am from <<country>> and would like to be considered for financial aid to cover my costs at your university. Please send details about scholarship and other funding opportunities for students from <<country>>, <<Central Europe or the former Soviet Union>>, or any other categories for which I may be eligible.

Thank you in advance for consideration of my request. I look forward to hearing from you at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

(sign here)

Name