



Forum: Educational Consulting

Topic: Things to know when Choosing a College

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Posted by: EastCoast

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Choosing a College
in the USA

While developing a educational service with other professionals and working with American students studying abroad and international students studying in the U.S., I realize how important it is for students to do a little research before choosing the school that best meets their needs and interests. Some time and effort spent in choosing the school can ensure a successful experience. This research should include the following:

1. Quality of instruction

Courses must be of high quality with excellent teachers. A broad variety of classes with modern facilities such as computer labs and libraries to support the classes is equally important. Does the program offer the courses and programs you want to study? Look at the school's catalogue and website for course and degree information. Check the reputation of the program by talking to students who have attended the program (ask for a list of former students from your country). Most American public and private colleges are accredited by governmental agencies and this accreditation provides a certain guarantee of quality.

Some American universities, however, offer a special program in English, but the international students are not really part of the university and cannot take university classes, only the special ESL classes. Sometimes these English programs are not even offered on the university campus. The word "Extension" sometimes means that the program is not part of the regular university and students are not regular university students and may not have contact with American students until they start attending regular courses at the University.

2. Location

Exactly where is the school located? Be careful about advertising. Some schools imply that they are in locations that they are not in. Be careful with the words "close to". "Close to" may be 50 miles away! Investigate the city where the school is located. Is it a place where you would want to live for the time you are abroad? Does it offer cultural or sports activities? What is the weather like? Do you want to live in a large urban city, a rural area or a middle sized city? Will transportation to the school be easy or will you have to buy a car? Is the city a university city where you would meet a lot of other students? Are there areas of interest where you would want to visit nearby? If the school is a language school, will you only be with other international students? Will you be on a college campus?

3. Student Services

A good program for international students will have an International Student Program Director, help with housing, an orientation to the school, city and American education system, and academic advising services all designed for international students. In other words, help is always there when you need it. A good program will also provide opportunities to meet American students and will offer social events and an opportunity to get involved in student activities.

4. Meet Your Needs

It is important to decide your goal in studying abroad and to be sure that the school you choose can meet your needs. For example, if you want a 4 year university degree but need to take English first, you may want to enroll in a community college that offers ESL and degree courses so that when your English is finished you can automatically take courses toward your degree without changing schools. Many community colleges also have excellent transfer programs to high prestige universities where you can earn a B.A. degree. Does the school offer the types of degrees you might be interested in? You may change your mind about what you want to study so having a variety of programs and degrees is important.

5. Cost

Is the cost reasonable for the program you will receive? Some private colleges are very expensive, but you receive excellent service. Some community colleges are inexpensive and you receive excellent service there as well. Many American and international students who want a university degree attend the first two years at a community college with lower costs and easier admission policies and then transfer for their last two years at a four year university. Compare costs to be sure you are getting value for your money.