

Applying to The United States

To be used with *US Application Checklist, US How to Apply, Timeline for Study Abroad, Common Application Instructions*

Students who plan to join a university in the US in the fall immediately after their A Level exams will be applying during the fall and spring of their 2nd year at The Lyceum. Finding the best match for you will take a lot of time and effort, but is well worth it.

US schools look at a lot of information about you when making admissions decisions. The goal of every college is to fill its freshman class with intelligent, dynamic and achievement oriented students who will bring a full range of talents and skills to the school and who will contribute to the diversity and the life of the campus. You must convince the admissions officers that they want you as part of their incoming freshman class.

AT THE LYCEUM (Affecting the Lyceum Transcript, AS Results, Predicted Grades, Teacher References, Secondary School Report, Counsellor Recommendation, and Extracurricular Activities List.)

Your behavior as a student at The Lyceum is the most recent evidence that colleges and universities have about you regarding your maturity, intelligence, attitude towards study, ability to seek and handle responsibility, personal drive, sense of humor, commitment to public service, ability to recover from setbacks, and all of your other sterling qualities. Universities prefer students who have already demonstrated that they like to study and learn and who have proved that they are consistently high achievers, not those who could do well but who don't care enough to work for it. Make sure your Lyceum record shows only your best.

Academics Strong school transcripts is the single most important academic factor, which is supported by strong projected A Level grades, good O and AS Level results and high standardized test scores. The difficulty of your course load and your school grades are very important to colleges, as they show your aptitude for difficult work and how well you perform in the classroom. Success in the US is based on steady work through 8 semesters, not 4 years of goofing off followed by cramming for exams. Your Lyceum transcript must show that you already know how to work hard at every step, during term as well as on exams. Take a rigorous program and maintain high grades. Consistent effort and good grades also result in strong teacher recommendation letters and forecasted grades.

The first transcript you send to a university will be dominated by your AI grades and June AS results. Make sure your June AS results are strong – do not rely on November re-exams, as the results come late, and the poor June grade has already made a bad impression. Also, preparing for Nov. re-sits will take time away from studying for school, studying for SAT/ACT, and writing applications. Make sure that your Lyceum record shows only your best, as it is the single most important part of your application.

Extra-curricular activities Involve yourself in extra-curricular activities, whether through The Lyceum or on your own. Choose a few, and then participate energetically, initiate activities, and seek positions of responsibility. Your participation in these activities highlights positive personal qualities that universities like, such as teamwork, dependability, commitment to others, and so on. If you have consistently pursued a particular activity, continue it through your A level studies as proof of dedication and perseverance. Do not involve yourself extracurricularly to the extent that your studies suffer. Pursue quality over quantity.

STANDARDIZED TESTING

In general, the more competitive the school is to get into, the more tests it will demand of you and the higher the scores it will expect to see. Carefully read the documents about standardized testing on The Lyceum website, particularly *SAT.ACT - Test Basics For Everyone*, and *SAT.ACT- When to take the SAT I-ACT*.

SAT I or ACT: The Lyceum requires students who will apply to the US to take SAT I/ACT during the AI year.

One of the most important reasons to test early is to help you gauge your competitiveness for particular schools; you can compare your scores to those of students who were admitted to those schools. Even your counselor cannot tell you exactly how strong a candidate you will be at any given school; the SAT/ACT score is the one piece of information that is consistent for all applicants and is easily comparable. If you don't test until AII, your scores will arrive too late to help you in this process.

SAT II: Requirements have been relaxed even by the most competitive ones. Recommended or optional at most schools, although strong SAT II scores can be an additional positive credential in your file.

TOEFL or IELTS: Take either IELTS or TOEFL as soon as you feel ready, preferably in the summer of your A1 year. Familiarize yourself with the test you choose: there are sections on reading, writing, listening and speaking. The most widely accepted test in the US is TOEFL. A TOEFL score can make you look like a more serious student

to US visa officers, so it is better to take it, even if you think your schools will exempt you from the TOEFL requirement. If you wish to avoid taking TOEFL, then you must, for each school that you will apply to, either find a clear exemption on the school's website, or obtain a specific, written exemption from the school.

TOEFL and IELTS: Register early; dates fill up quickly in the fall, and take it by the December of your AII year at the very latest. The name you register with must exactly match the name on your valid passport. TOEFL registration and preparation materials are available on the website - www.ets.org/toefl Internet based testing is offered on specific dates at permanent test centers in Karachi. IELTS registration is available through the British Council or the Australian Education Center. Registration is with a paper form and payment is in Pak rupees. www.ielts.org

AT HOME

Family Guidance

Financial Ask your family for an estimate of how much money they will have available for each year of your study. Read *US FinAid Basics for Int'l Students* or *US - Facts for Citizens/Residents* handout (as appropriate) and decide if you will need to apply for aid or seek additional funds for your study. It is important that you work with accurate figures from the start.

Preferential Decide with your family if there are any restrictions or guidelines for your college search. Do you want/need to be near relatives? Must you study in a specific field, country, type or "caliber" of school? It is up to each student and family to decide what type of undergraduate education will be appropriate (please see *Understanding Liberal Arts and Pre-professional Programs*, below). If you will not be permitted to study abroad, you should know now, so you do not waste time. Application costs require that parents support you from the start.

Documentation Apply for a passport if you don't have one. Make sure all of your documents (passport, certificates, test scores, transcripts, etc.) have the correct information on them. Spelling and composition of your name, and your birth date, in particular, should be the same on everything. Take steps to correct any documents with erroneous information.

CAREER GUIDANCE

Identify some careers you are considering and try to talk to people who are doing those jobs. Ask them about career prospects in their field as well as what it is like to do that kind of work. Ask them what they like best about their work, what they like least, what personal qualities they feel are necessary to do well and be happy in that work, and what educational preparation is the best. You should consider doing volunteer work or seeking an internship in your chosen field, to find out if it really is for you.

COLLEGE COUNSELLING

It is a Lyceum requirement that you must come to meet a college counsellor during your AI year if you are considering applying abroad. Appointments for AIs are in February – May. You will be asked about your academic record, your testing plans, and how much money is available for, and your goals for, your tertiary education. This information will be used to help you identify schools of potential interest. Your counsellor will not choose schools for you to apply to, but can help you figure out how to narrow down the huge number of schools to a manageable number.

When you meet in the fall of your AII year, your counsellor will want to see that you have spent the summer researching and choosing schools. She will ask you for the results of the AS exams and any SAT/TOEFL tests, and for any other changed or new information. Be prepared to discuss the schools that you are interested in and any questions that you have, so that you can quickly select your final list of up to 10 US schools. (13 is the combined maximum for all schools excluding Pakistan and the UK.)

RESEARCH

There are no shortcuts to this labor-intensive process. Complete your research during the spring and summer of your AI year. If you have to choose your schools and apply at the same time (fall of your AII year), it will be too big a demand on your time; you may make some hasty, ill-informed, and perhaps inappropriate decisions, and you will not be able to write strong applications. Do not let others do this work for you. If you are truly interested, then you will make time to investigate schools. There are many resources in the library and college counseling office, as well as online. Use the documents on The Lyceum's website.

Identify Choose schools that you think provide the education you want at a price you can afford (or can afford with aid that they can give). There are many books describing colleges, their entry requirements, and their costs in the counselling office and school library, and also at bookstores around Karachi. In the counseling office are also lists of schools with strengths in certain academic disciplines, and of schools which can provide need-based financial

aid to students they accept. Identify schools for which you feel well qualified, as well as “reach” (difficult to get into) and “safety” (where you are a strong candidate) schools.

Gather Information Search school websites for general information, applications, and any specific information you want, on topics such as financial aid and scholarships, particular departments or programs, or extracurricular opportunities. If you wish to receive hard copies, e-mail to request that this information be sent to you, even if next year’s application is not ready yet. A complaint students make every year is that materials are slow to arrive in the mail. Make sure to request information early.

Focus Your goal is to come back in the fall of your second year with a short list of no more than 25 schools that you are interested in. You should have read information about the schools over the course of the spring and summer and should be aware of what will be required of you in terms of application materials and standardized tests. Drop from your list schools that are too expensive or do not offer what you need, and from those remaining, narrow your list based on departmental strengths, size, location, average class size, facilities, atmosphere, prestige, etc. You must have the final list of schools that you will apply to by late September.

Make a List Assign the schools you are considering to the following categories of admissions difficulty (This is where your SAT score is very useful):

Double Reach: You think you won’t get in, but you won’t be happy unless you give it a shot.

Reach: Very hard to get in, but you have a chance

Possible: You are a good match for the school.

Likely: You feel that you are stronger than the average applicant, and are relatively sure that you can get in.

Decide how many schools you want in each category, and then choose schools accordingly. Once you have filled your slots, then you can only add a new school by taking out one from the same level of difficulty – no replacing a *Likely* with a *Reach*! You don’t have to use every category: if you have *Likelies* (or *Reaches*) in other countries, then you don’t need to have them in the US.

- **Full pay applicants:** Most schools on your list should be *Possibles*, with some *Reaches*. Have at least 2 *Likelies*. *Double Reaches* are optional; 1 or at most 2.
- **Financial Aid applicants:** You will not have any *Likely* schools. Those asking for the highest levels of aid will mostly have to choose from among *Reaches* and *Double Reaches*; which usually have the most aid. Those with a higher family contribution can add more *Possibles* to their list to increase their chances of admission.

UNDERSTANDING RANKINGS

Remember that there is vast depth in the US educational system, and a great education can be had at many schools that are not internationally famous. Use rankings like the one by *US News and World Report* as a guideline, and for the factual information, but remember that the ranking system is far from perfect. It is based only on the information that can be quantified, and the ranks assigned can vary significantly depending on how that information is weighted and calculated. There is a vast amount of information about schools that will not be represented by these rankings. (And remember, publishing rankings is big business.)

Imagine, if you will, being presented with 100 people and being asked to choose which one was the “best”. You could ask as many questions of them as you wanted, but could never come up with a list that others would always agree with. (Does best mean wealthiest? most attractive (by whose standards)? most philanthropic? kindest? most intelligent? the best cook? (you see where this is going).) How do you choose and weight the categories? And you could still hate the person who was chosen as “best”! The same holds true for schools. Similarly, if you got a B (89%) on an O Level exam and your friend got an A (90%), that does not necessarily mean that you can be labeled as “just a B student” and your friend as an “A student,” who is better than you in every way. So it is for the tier system of rankings.

In the end, you will get out of your education what you put in, and you will do the best academically in a subject you are truly interested in and at a place where you are happy. Later on, in the job market, an excellent academic and activities record from a less well-known university could easily be more valuable than a poor showing at one of the “best”. Also, the work you have done after graduation will become more important than the name of the school where you got your undergraduate degree.

UNDERSTANDING LIBERAL ARTS and PRE-PROFESSIONAL PROGRAMS

The emphasis of most colleges and universities in United States, as opposed to those in many other countries, is to provide a liberal arts education at the undergraduate level. The goal of a liberal arts education is to train students to think. Students study a wide range of subjects, and focus on a particular discipline. Through this intellectual training, students will learn to absorb and understand new material, to think critically and analytically, to draw

accurate conclusions, and to present themselves coherently and compellingly in speech and in writing. These skills, and the many others that will be acquired over the course of 4 years of undergraduate study, prepare students to be flexible in the face of an ever-evolving work environment and to be prepared to embrace new career opportunities and paths. Students with a strong liberal arts background are then capable of succeeding in any career, or in graduate education that will give specific career training, when desired. Liberal arts colleges focus on providing a liberal arts education to undergraduate students (those studying for a Bachelors degree). Universities will normally have undergraduate divisions for liberal arts and pre-professional programs, and they will also have divisions for graduate study (for those seeking Masters or PhD degrees).

Liberal Arts Programs Programs in the humanities, social sciences and physical sciences are collectively referred to as the “liberal arts,” or “arts and sciences”. Within a liberal arts program, there is considerable freedom to select courses from various disciplines, and to choose (and change if desired), the major course of study. In most cases, students can choose to major in any subject, even if it was not a subject studied in high school. The liberal arts division of a large university is often referred to as a college, for example Yale College of Yale University, and the College of Literature, Science and the Arts of the University of Michigan.

In order to graduate, a student must take a certain number of courses meeting specific requirements determined by the school. Colleges commonly require students to take a set number of courses in their major subject; the remaining courses may be taken to fill other graduation requirements or as electives that are of interest to the student. If a student wishes, he or she may take the required courses for two major subjects to earn a double major, or may choose to concentrate some of the elective courses in a single discipline in order to earn a minor. Double majors and minors are usually earned within the same undergraduate division.

Where undergraduate programs are divided into “schools” (business, liberal arts, engineering, etc) there is usually limited cross-registration between schools and there may be restrictions on transferring from one undergraduate school to another.

Students must balance the flexibility and freedom of choice offered by liberal arts programs with the need to complete graduation requirements. Students who wish to graduate within the standard four years should start taking courses that meet graduation requirements from the first year, and even if not sure of a major should start taking courses in areas of prospective interest. Students are usually asked to declare their major during the second year of study, and it is expected that a student will already have taken some courses that meet major and other graduation requirements. Students will be assigned an academic advisor when they join a college, and should meet with their advisor early in the first year to plan their studies. This is especially important for students who hope to complete a double major or a major and a minor. Special advising is available for students who plan to go on to law or medical school. Other graduate advising is usually done within a student’s major department.

Pre-professional Programs Undergraduate pre-professional programs such as architecture, art, business, engineering and nursing are usually more rigid than those in the arts and sciences. Students will follow a more structured sequence of required courses and may have very few elective courses, which can make it difficult to transfer into a pre-professional program. Often pre-professional courses prefer or require students to have significant high school preparation in related subjects or present a portfolio, and some may take 5 years to complete. Medicine and law are not offered as undergraduate programs in the US.

Graduate Programs After completing a 4-year undergraduate degree, students can apply to be accepted into a program leading to a graduate degree. Admission and costs are separate. For Arts and Sciences subjects, a Master’s Degree (MA) is followed by a Doctoral Degree (PhD). Law school is a 3-year program leading to a JD degree. Business school is a 2 year program leading to an MBA. Medical School is a 4-year program that is followed by 3-4 years of residency and 2-3 years of fellowship leading to an MD. Some US medical schools may not accept international students, or may require full payment in advance.

UNDERSTANDING COSTS

For international students, it is critical to know how much money will be available for your education. Roughly:

- 1) If you have US \$60,000/year or more: You can usually pay full for the most expensive type of education – a private college or university in the US, where total costs can sometimes total somewhere between US \$50-70,000 - and you are very lucky. You can consider all schools and your admission chances are greatly improved. Naturally, even full pay students are not guaranteed admission everywhere they apply.
- 2) If you have US \$35,000 - \$50,000/year: You will need, in most cases, to ask for some aid if you will apply to private colleges and universities in the US. It is always better to be able to ask for less money, so having this much is in your favor. You can consider paying full for a US public university education, where tuition costs are lower. Generally, the most well known public universities in the most desirable locations are going to cost more than ones that are further off the beaten track. Universities in the UK cost about the same per year

as an average public institution in the US, but the degree programs can be one year shorter, thus reducing costs. This amount is also comfortable for Canadian universities.

- 3) If you have under \$35,000/year to spend, you will need to ask for aid everywhere in the US (with a few exceptions), and your list will be shaped by this fact. Mostly you will be looking at private schools, but there may be public schools that have some money for foreign students. The less money you can pay, the greater percentage of its total aid budget the school has to want to commit to you. Be sure you can meet any minimum payment a school may require and that it can offer enough aid before you apply. For Canadian schools, you will need to look for schools that can provide aid or scholarship. Most Canadian schools do not have need based aid, and those offering large scholarships are few.
- 4) If you have significantly under \$15,000/year, you will be restricted to schools that can offer large aid packages and/or scholarships and which do not have high minimum payments. If you can pay \$15,000/year, then that is approximately one year's worth of living expenses, and you can look at schools where the maximum aid is full tuition. Even if you are a strong student you should have some good educational options in Pakistan, as you may not win an aid package that will meet your needs from a university abroad.

Consider ways to reduce your costs.

1. Consider less expensive schools – both public and private.
2. Consider living with relatives. Make sure you apply to schools within commuting distance. Find out how you would commute - buying a car and paying insurance is expensive, and relying on public transport can be restrictive and expensive. If living with relatives makes it possible for you to go, it may be worth giving up the dorm experience.
3. Consider asking about tuition remission at public universities, whereby you can apply for reduced or waived tuition fees. Schools that already receive applications from as many international students as they want are less likely to offer this option than ones that want to attract international students.

REFERENCE MATERIALS

A large number of reference materials are available on the school website, in the College Counseling office and in the library. Many forms, lists and other documents are available for copying at the photocopy shop.