

Universities in the United States remain the most favored destination among students and professionals participating in international exchanges. This article offers tips to help budget and reduce costs while studying in the United States.

According to the College Board, in 2016, the *average* annual cost of tuition per international student ranged from \$23,893 to \$32,405 depending on type of university and location. Other expenses, such as mandatory health insurance, housing and transportation need to be estimated when preparing a budget. Given the cost of studying in the United States, international students are better off when utilizing a combination of financing strategies. These strategies include personal savings, reducing expenses, taking advantage of work-study programs, and identifying sources of financial aid such as grants, scholarships and loans. I trust you will find the following tips to help finance your U.S. education helpful.

BUDGETING

The Institute of International Education in the Open Doors 2016 report indicated that about 73.9% of international students receive the majority of their funds from sources outside of the United States, including personal and family sources as well as assistance from their home country governments or universities.

Since personal finances play such an important role, it is essential that international students develop sound financial habits such as establishing realistic budgets and reducing personal expenses. When creating their budgets, students need to consider educational costs and living expenses.

The [U.S. government](#), University financial aid offices, as well as [EducationUSA](#) advisors located in many cities in the Americas, Chamber of Commerce in your country, and public libraries, are useful sources for obtaining information on living expenses. It is important for students to have realistic estimates of their expenses when preparing budgets.

CUTTING COSTS

Living expenses include the cost of housing, transportation, food, clothing, books and other personal items. These expenses can vary greatly in the United States, depending on the region of the country where the student chooses to study, for instance the South or the Mid-West tends to be less expensive than the East.

Another alternative is to attend a university that offers an accelerated program which allows transfer credits or advanced standing for studies completed in one's home country. Also, other types of accelerated programs allow students to take courses at less expensive community colleges, during the summer, or take additional number of courses beyond what is required throughout the semester for the same price.

Students should also try to find additional ways to curtail living expenses. In doing so, students can reduce housing costs by becoming a resident assistant in a dormitory or by living off campus with a relative or friend. Many universities have international or language themed dormitories which seek to employ international students as residential assistants.

FINANCIAL AID

Due to the high cost of studying in the U.S., many international students will need to find alternatives to relying on personal funds to finance their education, and therefore, they should research what financial aid and employment options are available. [Financial aid](#) consists of two types: free aid, typically known as scholarships, grants or fellowships.

Scholarships can appear in places where you least expect. This type of aid tends to be highly competitive and requires excellent academic records. Possible resources for free aid include government, corporate, and institutional sources in one's home country and in the United States. Many governments will provide funding for students, particularly those studying math, sciences or technology. In addition, some employers may be willing to fund their employee's studies. Since students are not required to pay back this money, students should apply for as many scholarships and fellowships for which they are eligible and competitive.

To start your search, visit: <http://www.oas.org/en/rowefund/FinancialGuideForHigherEducation.pdf>.

PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT

For many international students part-time employment is another option to finance higher education. Talk to your Foreign Student Advisor upon completion of the first year of your studies as international students may apply to work on and off campus for up to 20 hours a week. Likewise, the university's international student adviser is an excellent resource for information on jobs available to international students and for information on how to apply for work permit.

LOANS

Loans should be considered a supplement to other financial resources such as scholarships, personal savings, or income from employment. The General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (the OAS) offers both [scholarships](#) and [interest-free loans](#) through the Rowe Fund program to help finance the studies of Latin American and Caribbean citizens in the United States. Given the supplementary nature of the Rowe Fund program, beneficiaries need to secure additional resources to successfully finance their studies (for more information, visit: www.oas.org/en/rowefund or e-mail: rowefund@oas.org).

In general, when seeking loans, students need to determine how much they will need to borrow and how they will repay the loan prior to applying for one. A general guideline is to avoid borrowing from a commercial bank and never borrow more than absolutely necessary. Many international student loans require that a U.S. citizen guarantee the loan and that the international student already be enrolled in a U.S. university, even before applying. When developing a repayment plan, students need to consider many factors: what the required monthly repayment will be, when repayment begins, how many payments will be needed, what fees will be imposed, what interest rate(s) will be levied, and whether there will be a loan forbearance period while the student is in school. There are many financial aid websites that provide loan calculator tools to help students in this process. Making informed decisions about educational loans can save students thousands of dollars in the future.

As many ponder if the benefits of college still outweigh the cost, the return on education has remained high in spite of rising tuition. US universities are currently focusing on measuring the rate of employability assuring students that international exchange strengthens graduate employability. With planning and smart financial decisions, studying in the United States does not have to be unattainable for international students. In the end, students will have to decide whether the many benefits that an international educational experience provides are worth the expense.

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