



TopUniversities.com

How to **SUPPORT YOUR CHILD**
to **STUDY ABROAD** in the

United States

Guide for Parents



03 Introduction



Getting started

- 04 What you need to know about higher education in the US
- 05 How to help your child choose a university
- 06 Student visas
- 07 Tuition fees & other costs
- 08 Funding options
- 09 Accommodation & healthcare
- 10 Popular US cities for international students

Application & enrolment

- 13 Admission requirements & applications
- 14 Preparing for enrolment
- 15 Preparing to start studies

Student life & careers

- 16 Student life in the US
- 17 Working part-time in the US during studies
- 18 Working in the US after graduation
- 19 Working abroad after graduating from a US university

Final points to remember





The United States has one of the world's most prestigious higher education systems, and is home to over 4,000 colleges and universities.

It remains the world's most popular destination for international students, welcoming a record of 974,926 students in the 2014/15 academic year. The most popular states for international study in the US are California, New York and Texas, and the most popular subjects are business and management, engineering, mathematics and computer science.

It's not a secret that many of the world's leading universities are located in the US. In fact, according to the QS World University Rankings® 2015/16, half of the top 10 universities in the world are in the US. These are MIT, Harvard, Stanford, Caltech and the University of Chicago, but besides these well-known names, the US is home to hundreds of other prestigious universities and colleges.

It's not a secret that many of the world's leading universities are located in the US.

Of course, it's not just the high standard of US universities that draws students in. From the bright lights of the big city to miles of unspoiled wilderness; sun-kissed beaches and lush forests; the rustic and traditional or the sleek and modern, this huge and incredibly diverse country has something for everyone.

With so many international students choosing to complete their studies in the US, this country is characterized by diversity and flexibility, aspects that are important to take into consideration when your child is preparing to study and live in another country.

Read on for all you need to know as a parent supporting your child as she or he prepares to study abroad in the US.

What you need to know about higher education in the US

Offering one of the world's finest university systems, with outstanding programs across the full spectrum of fields, the United States is an amazing educational hub for ambitious students. As the home of more than 150 universities in the QS World University Rankings®, the US offers many opportunities to study at an internationally known and respected institution. For many international students, this means the chance to study in a highly innovative environment, benefitting from world-class facilities and resources.

Compared to most higher education systems around the world, the US system is largely independent from federal government regulation and is highly decentralized. It is characterized by diversity, flexibility and a wide range of choices for students.

Compared to most higher education systems around the world, the US system is largely independent from federal government regulation and is highly decentralized. It is characterized by diversity, flexibility and a wide range of choices for students.

Undergraduate degrees at US universities typically take four years to complete, while master's degrees usually last two years. The first part of an undergraduate degree is often spent studying a range of different subjects, including some required courses and some electives. After this, students choose the subject or subjects on which they want to focus – known as their “major(s)”. They may also earn a “minor” qualification alongside their major, by completing classes in an additional field.



USA



How to help your child choose a university

Choosing the perfect university is a decision which can involve the whole family, and you can play an important role in helping your son or daughter research and compare different options. It will be important for them to know you are on hand to offer help and support, so you should be ready to offer guidance whenever they need it.

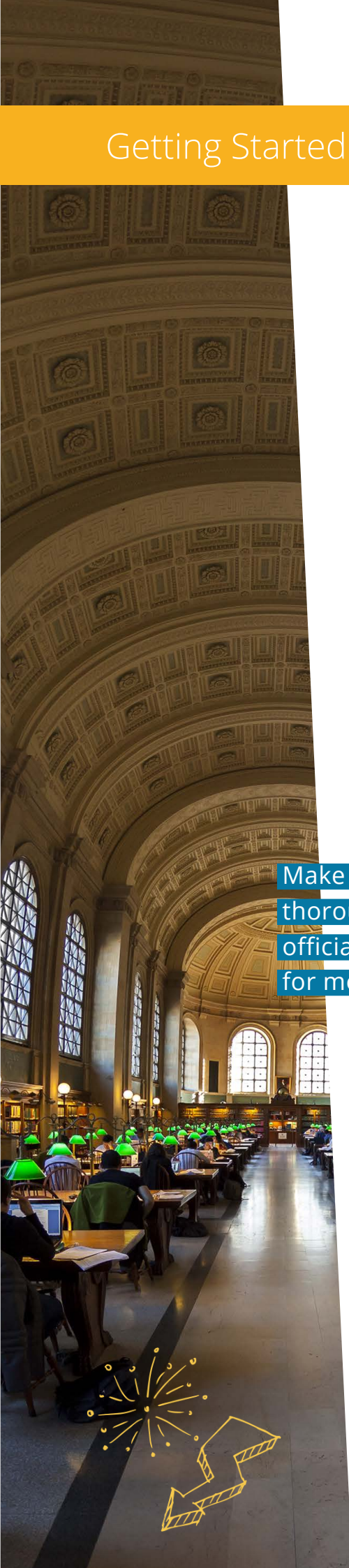
The first stage is to help your child decide on a course of study. You'll need to identify the subjects he or she is really passionate about, what qualifications will be most helpful when pursuing their desired career path, and what skills they will develop during their studies.

Once your child has identified the fields of study they are interested in, you can help them shortlist the best US universities in that particular subject. Subject-specific university rankings can be a very useful way to identify the US universities that best match the interests of your son or daughter.

Make a shortlist of the institutions your child is interested in, and thoroughly research each one. Check university websites for official information, course prospectuses and visit online forums for more 'insider' tips.

Make a shortlist of the institutions your child is interested in, and thoroughly research each one. Check university websites for official information, course prospectuses and visit online forums for more 'insider' tips. Make sure your child thoroughly researches the course content, so that they don't end up surprised or disappointed. You could also contact the university for more details about the career opportunities students have after graduating from their courses.

Another important factor to consider when choosing a US university is the location. Your son or daughter may be dreaming about studying in the US – but remember that each state and city has its own distinctive personality, culture, climate, economy and environment. Take a look at our state guides to help you and your child decide on a location in which they will feel happy and safe.



Student visas

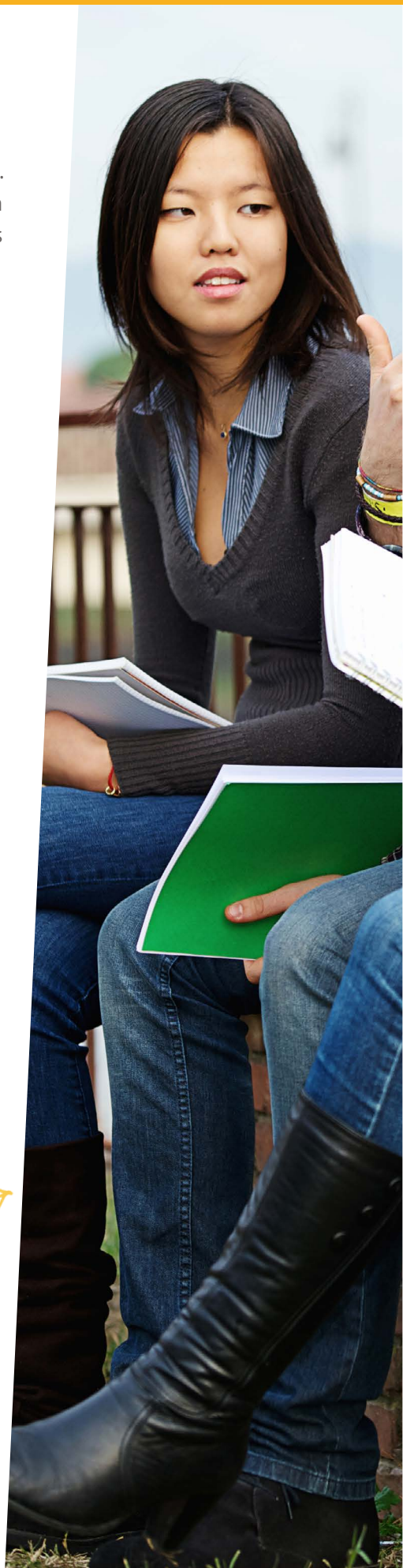
In order to study in the US, your child will need to obtain a student visa. Applying for a US student visa can be a long process, so make sure your son or daughter starts preparing well in advance – at least three to five months before their course is due to start.

In general, prospective students will go through five stages when applying for a US student visa:

1. Apply to and be accepted by a US university which is approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) – this should be achieved six to twelve months prior to starting studies.
2. Pay the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) fee.
3. Complete a US student visa application along with recent photo(s).
4. Pay the visa application fee.
5. Schedule and attend a visa interview.

In order for your child to be eligible to study in the US, you need to make sure that their college has sent them a form confirming they have been accepted at an authorized institution. They will need to bring this to the visa interview.

After your son or daughter is accepted as a student by a US institution, they will be able to make an appointment for a visa interview at the US Embassy in your country, pay the required fees, and work towards getting their visa. You can help by compiling a checklist of all the documents they will need, and helping them make sure they have everything ready.



Tuition fees & other costs

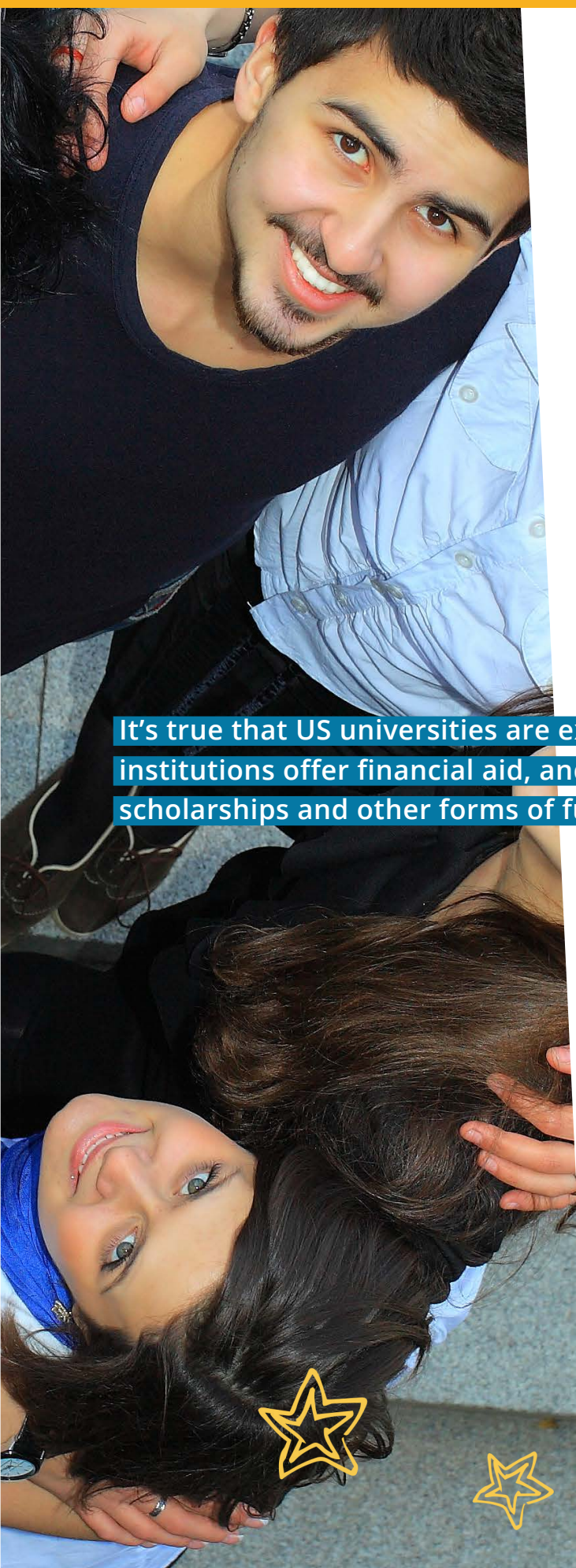
When your son or daughter decides they want to study abroad in the US, you need to start planning a budget and see if you can manage the financial aspects. It's true that US universities are expensive, but you will also discover that most institutions offer financial aid, and your child may be able to access scholarships and other forms of funding.

When checking the tuition fees, make sure you're looking at the relevant rate. Public universities in the US usually charge lower fees for students from within the same state, with a higher rate for everyone else. Private universities typically charge just one set fee for all students, regardless of nationality.

It's true that US universities are expensive, but you will also discover that most institutions offer financial aid, and your child may be able to access scholarships and other forms of funding.

Fees are usually lower at public universities, though this is not always the case. According student support organization College Board, the fees at public universities for international students are an average of US\$22,958 per year (as of 2014/15). This compares to an average of US\$31,231 at private non-profit universities. In addition, you would need to add the costs of accommodation, transport, and other living expenses.

While these add up to substantial amounts, bear in mind that there a good chance you will not have to pay the full tuition fee amount. All US universities offer a range funding options, and your child may also be eligible to apply for scholarships offered by external organizations. Read the section below on funding options for more details.



Funding options

If you are worried that some of the US universities your child is interested in may be too expensive, that doesn't mean that you have to cross them off the list. Most US universities offer financial aid packages that your child could access if they are eligible, well-prepared and do not miss the deadline. There are also many scholarships to study in the US, offered by individual universities and other organizations, which they can research and apply for.

Most US universities offer financial aid packages that your child could access if they are eligible, well-prepared and do not miss the deadline.

US financial aid

US financial aid is usually supplied based on two distinct criteria: merit-based and need-based. Need-based aid is based on an assessment of the student's financial circumstances, while merit-based aid considers academic grades, athletic performance, involvement in organizations and other outstanding talents.

While international students are not eligible for federal aid provided by the US government, many universities in the US provide their own aid schemes – both need- and merit-based. Five US universities also offer fully **need-blind admission** to domestic and international students: Amherst, Yale, Princeton, MIT and Harvard. This means students are accepted without any consideration of their ability to pay, and the university then pledges to contribute as much as is necessary to enable them to attend.

If you want to get an idea of what US financial aid your child is eligible for, use the 'net price calculator' on university websites (all institutions are required to offer this service).

In addition, your son or daughter can also work part-time in order to support themselves, or take up a loan. There are plenty of opportunities out there; make sure you start researching as early as possible to optimize your child's chances of securing sufficient funding.





Accommodation & healthcare



Student accommodation

In the US, individual students are usually responsible for finding their own accommodation, but it is common for the university to offer help or support. Most universities will offer a variety of housing options. This may include traditional halls of residence, where meals are provided for a termly or annual payment, as well as self-contained apartments, where students share facilities with other students and are responsible for their own cooking and cleaning.

Some students will share a room with another student, while others may have their own ensuite room. As a parent, you will know what your child has been used to, and be able to help them select from the variety of housing choices available.

Healthcare

The US does not provide socialized healthcare, and accessing healthcare can be expensive. However, it is often possible for international students to use healthcare services provided on-campus, and this is usually the cheapest option. Most US universities offer basic healthcare services, such as first-aid and treatment of minor ailments. Some offer a full range of services, including laboratory tests, prescription drugs and access to specialists.

To cover the costs of healthcare, many US universities have their own health insurance plans. These are often mandatory, especially for international students, and may be included in the fees charged by the university. If health insurance is not provided by the university, contact the institution's International Student Office for advice on suitable health insurance plans. This will help you be confident that the plan is sufficient to cover the costs of any medical care your son or daughter needs during their studies.



Staying in touch

As a parent, you'll want to be sure your child is safe and happy. Before they leave, you may want to discuss issues such as healthy eating, or the risks related to drinking alcohol. You could also agree a few specific times for them to call or email you during their first few days and weeks away from home. This will mean you know they're safe, while giving them regular support during this exciting, but often overwhelming, initial period.

Popular US cities for international students

Boston

Boston is a major hub for the world's best and brightest students and academics. The city itself offers a number of internationally ranked universities, while the nearby student town of Cambridge, MA, is home to both the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** and **Harvard University**, ranked first and second in the QS World University Rankings® 2015/16. Boston is one of the most historic cities in the US, as well as being known as a pleasant place to live, making it an all-round good choice for incoming international students.

New York

The one US city that needs no further introduction, New York is one of the most popular destinations for students from around the world. From its iconic skyline and architecture to its innovation across a wide range of sectors, New York is the perfect starting point for ambitious international students looking to start an impressive career. The highest ranked institution in the Big Apple is **Columbia University**, currently 22nd in the world.

San Francisco

Adjacent to California's famed tech innovation hub Silicon Valley, San Francisco is another iconic US city, within striking distance of two of the world's most prestigious universities: **Stanford University** and the **University of California, Berkeley**, currently ranked joint 3rd and 26th in the world respectively. If you think your child would enjoy the combination of a relaxed beachside lifestyle, in close proximity to the innovation hub where companies including Apple, Facebook and IBM were born, San Fran could be the right choice.

Chicago

A fast-paced metropolis, located in Illinois alongside Lake Michigan, Chicago offers rich cultural opportunities and exceptional academic facilities. Chicago is home to two of the world's most prestigious universities: the **University of Chicago** (ranked 10th in the world), and **Northwestern University** (ranked 32nd). The city itself ranks joint 30th in the 2016 edition of the **QS Best Student Cities** index, gaining its strongest score in the "employer activity" category – reflecting the esteem its institutions enjoy among employers both within and outside the US.



Los Angeles

Los Angeles is likely to be the top choice for those fascinated by the star-packed streets of Hollywood. It remains largely defined by the creative industries on which its wealth is founded: music, television, and most of all film – but there's more to LA than sunshine, beaches and celebs. The city is also home to a number of prestigious universities, including the world-renowned **University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)**, currently ranked 27th in the world.

Washington DC

Studying in Washington DC means being right at the heart of US history and politics; the White House, Supreme Court and national monuments and memorials are all located here. Aside from all the iconic buildings and political buzz, the federal capital is also known for its lively arts and music venues, and particularly its jazz scene. There are a good selection of highly ranked universities to choose from, both within the city and just outside. These include the nearby **University of Maryland, College Park**, which ranks joint 126th in the world.

Philadelphia

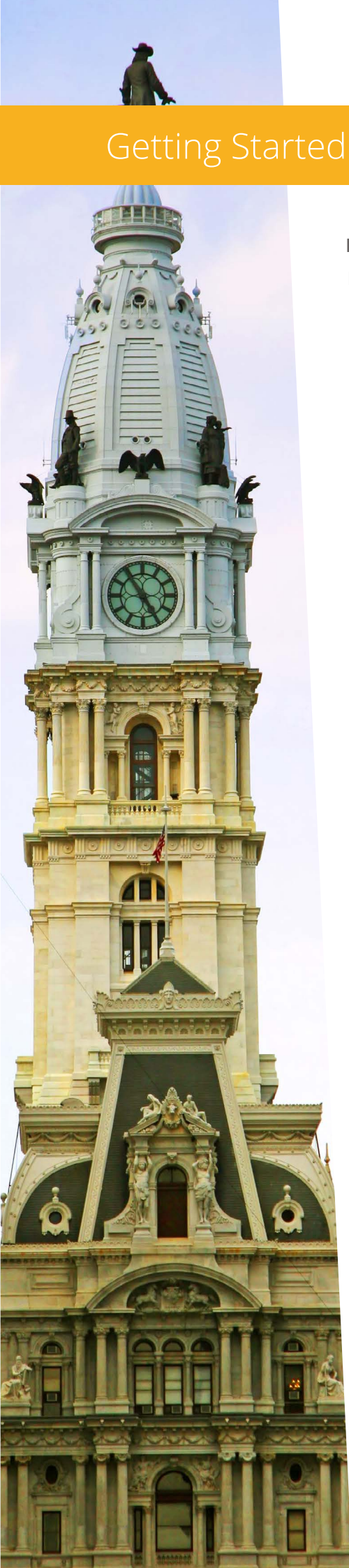
Heading a little further north into the state of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia is home to the famous **University of Pennsylvania**, an Ivy League member ranked 18th in the world, as well as **Drexel University** and **Temple University**. Rich in history, the city has a good selection of museums and galleries, as well as thriving arts, theater and music scenes, making it another great destination for international students.

Pittsburg

Over on western side of Pennsylvania, Pittsburg offers the chance to study at the world-renowned **Carnegie Mellon University**. Besides its great academic opportunities, the culture of the city is also full of interest, and its student community is diverse. If your child is a sports fan, she or he may be excited to know that Pittsburgh is known for its passionate sports supporters and great matches – spanning American football, baseball, ice hockey, basketball and more.

Atlanta

The capital and largest city of the southeastern US state of Georgia, Atlanta is a thriving center of commerce with an impressive skyline, home to television network CNN, the Coca-Cola world headquarters and Delta airlines. It's also nicknamed the 'city in a forest' due to its abundance of trees, offering an appealing combination of high rises and green spaces. Atlanta's highest ranked academic institution, **Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech)**, ranks among the world's top 100.



Getting Started

How to Support Your Child to Study Abroad in the US
www.TopUniversities.com

Baltimore

The largest city in the east-coast state of Maryland, Baltimore is a historic seaport. It's home to one of the best medical schools in the world, **Johns Hopkins University**, as well as the **University of Maryland, Baltimore County**. Baltimore has attracted attention in recent years as the setting for popular TV series *The Wire*. But don't let the show's gritty underworld scare you off - the other side to the city includes trendy shops and bars, multicultural restaurants, and famously friendly locals.

San Diego

Heading back to California, San Diego offers attractive beaches and numerous tourist attractions, and is also often featured in lists of the safest cities in the US. There are many universities and private colleges in San Diego and the presence of the **University of California, San Diego** and other research institutions has helped to fuel biotechnology growth in the city.

USA



Admission requirements & applications



Applying to study at a US college will take time and concentration. Each application is different and involves collecting recommendations, writing essays, submitting test results, and other requirements. For your child to start his or her application to study in the US, they will need to apply directly to each of the universities they're interested in. Remember that athletic recruitment and sports scholarships follow a slightly different timeline to regular applications, so it's worth checking the application deadlines early (one to one and a half years before enrollment) to avoid missing out.

For your child to start his or her application to study in the US, they will need to apply directly to each of the universities they're interested in.

Entry requirements for each university are different, but most involve completing an admissions test or essay; standardized admissions tests such as the SAT, ACT or GRE; English language tests such as the IELTS or TOEFL; and providing recommendation letters from teachers. On top of this, most universities ask for a transcript of the student's grades and a personal statement.

It's important for your child to start early, as universities will usually ask them to write personal essays and provide letters of recommendation. In order to complete all of the requirements to a high standard and meet the deadlines, they need to start planning ahead. Suggest that your child creates a calendar of deadlines, and help them keep track of what they need to do for each application.

Typically, applications are due between November and January. Your child should start to collect the required information and documents at least 12 months prior to this. You also need to be informed about the fees they will need to pay during the application process. Usually, the fee for each application is between \$35 and \$100. Write all these details in the calendar along with the deadlines.



Preparing for enrolment

When a response has been received from all of your son or daughter's chosen universities, they'll need to reply to any offers they have received. This is a very important step in the process, and they'll need to be absolutely sure they accept the right offer, for the right reasons. They will need your support in making this decision.

You need to make sure your child understands the conditions of their offers, and help them to contact the universities for any additional clarification. If they have trouble choosing between the universities that gave a positive reply, you can help them to gather more information, or even get in contact with current and former students. This can help them gain some valuable insights and feel confident about whether this is somewhere they would like to spend their student years.

Once your child has been accepted to study at a US university they will be entered into an international student database called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

Once your child has been accepted to study at a US university, they will be entered into an international student database called the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS). They will be sent a copy of the information stored on this, which they will need to check for accuracy. It's also important to ensure your child pays the application fee (the SEVIS I-901 fee) for this database service, which is US\$200.



Preparing to start studies



Preparing to go and live in a new country can be a daunting experience. Even after your child has gone through the process of choosing a university, getting a place, and arranging their visa, there is still a lot of work to be done.

Packing

Their first challenge is deciding what to pack. Though it can be tempting to try and squeeze your child's entire life into a couple of suitcases, you need to advise them to be selective about what makes the cut, and what stays at home. Remember, some things will be cheaper to buy locally than to transport across the world.

Cultural differences

Another thing to take into consideration is the culture shock. While your son or daughter is likely to be keen to explore new experiences, arriving in the middle of a new culture can also be difficult to adapt to. Let them know that the experience of 'culture shock' is a normal phase, and that you're there to provide support via phone or Skype whenever they need to talk.

Research the local area

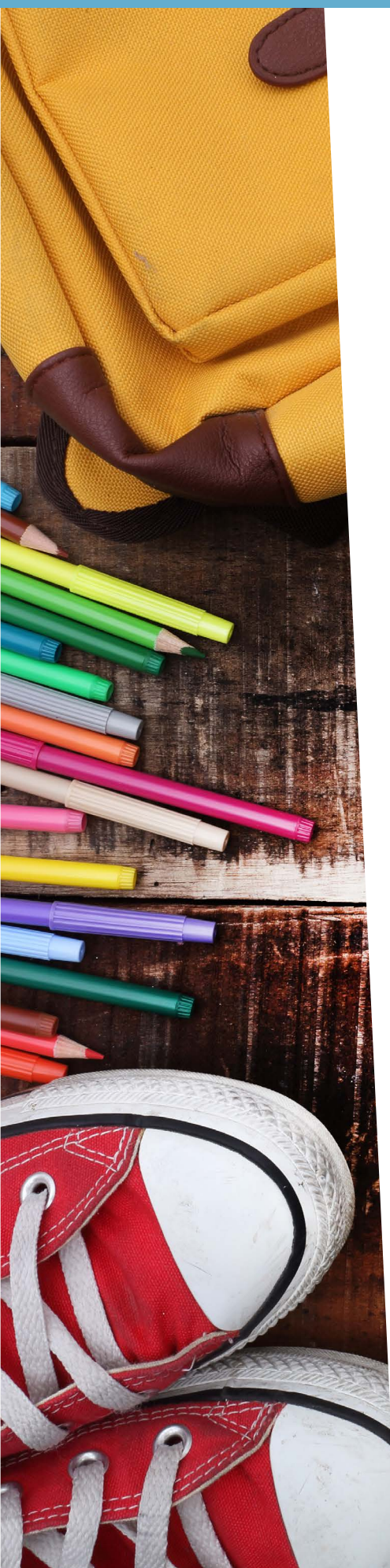
Before your child sets off for the US, they should take some time to learn about the area they're about to be living in. What activities are popular, what will the weather be like, and how will they travel around? Get online and see what you can find out!

Making new friends

Advise your child to join student societies not just when they arrive, but also before they set off. Use the internet to find student groups at your child's university, and see if they can connect via email or social media. This can be a great way for your son or daughter to start making friends in the US while still at home.

List of personal goals

Before leaving, your child could consider compiling a list of the things they want to achieve during their studies. These could be academic aims, but also personal goals – such as learning how to cook, visiting a particular location, or gaining a new set of skills. This list will come in handy on those days when they're feeling lost or uncertain, helping to remind them of all the reasons they decided to study in the US.



Student life in the US

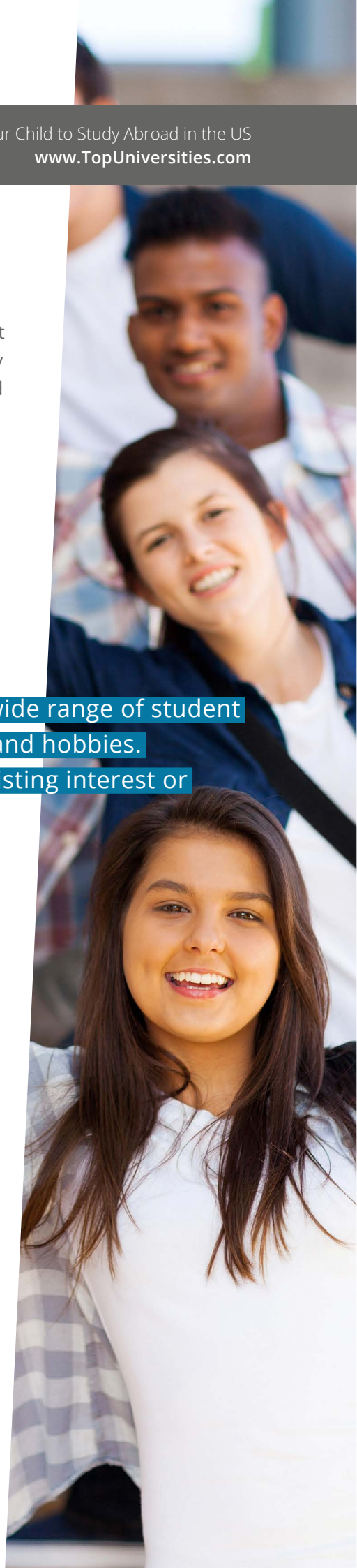
For some, the social aspects of student life may be the most important part of the study abroad experience. Socializing is the best way to not only make everlasting friendships, but also really learn about other people and cultures – not only the local culture but also those of other international students.

International students may be shy about meeting new people, but universities organize a range of events designed to make this as easy and comfortable as possible. This often commences with a dedicated program of events for newly arrived international students, designed to help them get settled and start making friends. Find out if this is the case at your son or daughter's university, and make sure they attend!

More generally, American student life is well known for its wide range of student clubs and societies – spanning all kinds of sports, interests and hobbies. These are a great way to meet people, while pursuing an existing interest or trying something new.

More generally, American student life is well known for its wide range of student clubs and societies – spanning all kinds of sports, interests and hobbies. These are a great way to meet people, while pursuing an existing interest or trying something new. Encourage your child to sign up, and make the most of this opportunity to get to know both US citizens and other international students. As soon as they have a group of friends, they'll feel much more 'at home' in their new location.

As with anything else in life, staying positive is always helpful. Faced with a different lifestyle, your child is sure to feel overwhelmed at some point. When this happens, remind them that this is normal, and that most international students experience this phase. Encourage them to keep joining in with student life, and remind them that there are both student representatives and university staff members available to help if they really feel concerned.



Working part-time in the US during studies

If your child has been accepted by a US university, they will be able to study in the US once their F1 student visa is approved. The F1 visa category is reserved for academic students enrolled in US universities, colleges, high schools, language training programs, and other academic institutions.

When it comes to international students working in the US, there are some restrictions. Students with F1 visas are generally allowed to work on the campus of their university for up to 20 hours a week.

If your son or daughter wants to work part-time while studying, they should first talk with their designated school official (DSO). As long as they have a valid US student visa and are in good academic standing, the process should go smoothly. They just need to contact their DSO and s/he will present them with jobs that could be suitable.

There are two main types of jobs a student can take: on-campus and off-campus. The second category doesn't usually work for international students, but your child's DSO can help them with more information if they really need it. You can find out more at the US Citizenship and Immigration Services website.



On-campus employment with a US student visa

Your child's US student visa allows them to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week when school is in session, and full-time during school break periods (up to 40 hours per week).

On-campus employment is defined as work that takes place on campus, or at an off-campus location that is affiliated with the university. That could mean working in a university bookstore, cafeteria or other facilities where students can help.



Off-campus employment with a US student visa

Things get a little more complicated if your child wishes to work off-campus, but there are some training programs that F1 students can get permission to work under: Optional Practical Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT). To check if your child is eligible, s/he should discuss these options with their DSO.

Working in the US after graduation

You may hope your child will be able to build a strong international career in the US after completing their studies. The American immigration process is complex and job-hunting for international students can be difficult, but this is definitely not impossible.

The American immigration process is complex and job-hunting for international students can be difficult, but this is definitely not impossible.

There are many types of US visa, but here are the most common options applicable to graduates:

- **Optional Practical Training with an F-1 Visa**

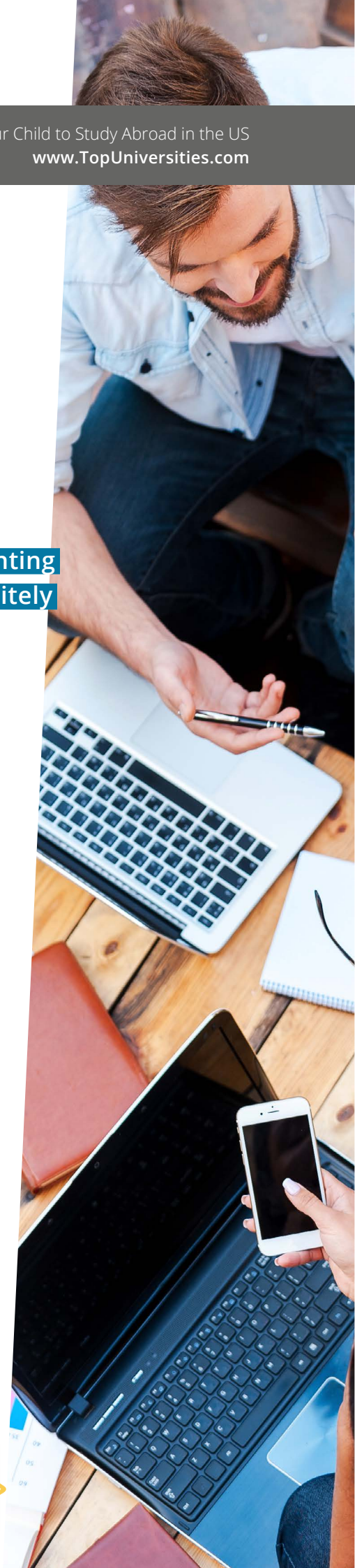
The F1 student visa will allow your child to engage in one year of post-completion practical training. International students are authorized to work under the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program for up to 12 months once they've graduated. In order to apply and get more information, they will need to speak to the international students' department at their university.

- **Non-Immigrant H-3 Visa**

This type of visa is perfect for those who don't have appropriate work experience and would like to train in a particular field in the US. In order to apply, your child will have to secure training with a US employer with an established training program. The H-3 visa is valid for two years.

- **Non-Immigrant H-1B Visa**

This is another type of visa your child could apply for in order to work in the US after graduation. In order to qualify, your son or daughter will need to find a US employer to sponsor them, and their future job must be related to their field of study. The H-1B is granted for an initial period of three years and can be extended for an additional three years.



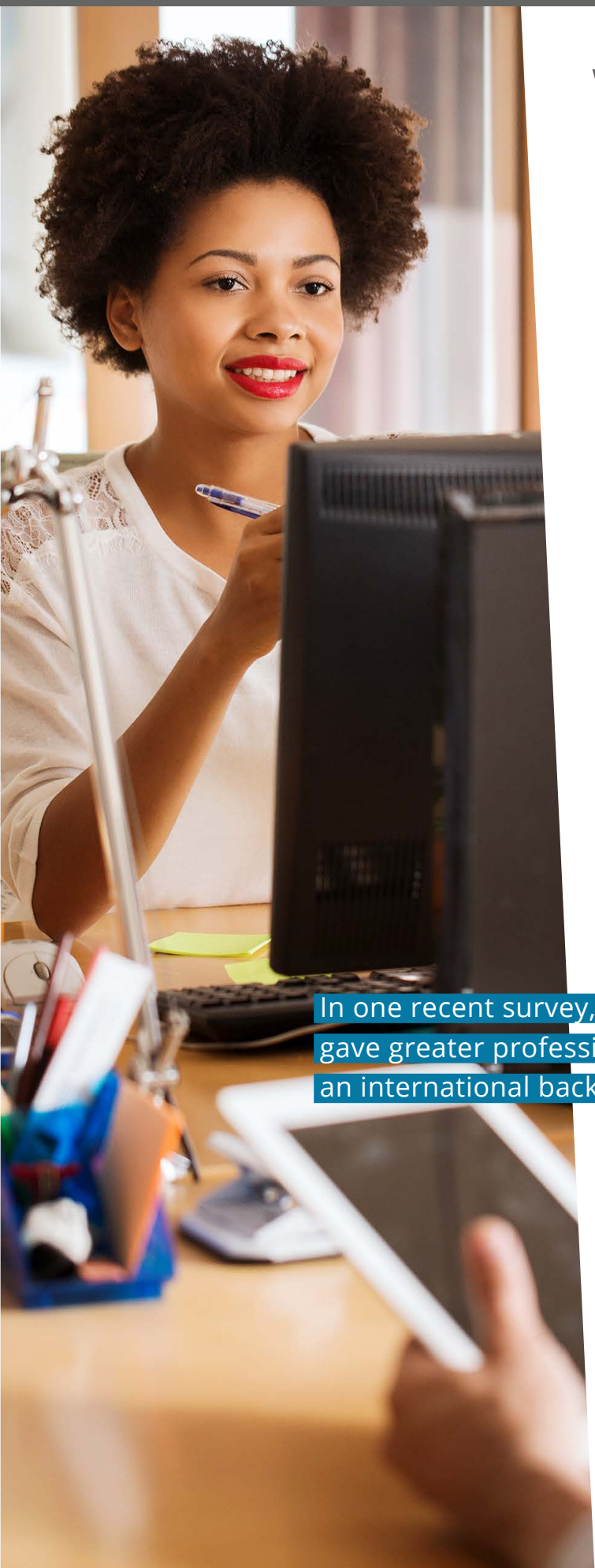
Working abroad after graduating from a US university

The effort that both you and your child made in order to them to study abroad in the US will surely pay off. A survey published by the Institute of International Education in 2014 indicated that nearly 90% of study abroad alumni secured a job within the first six months after graduation. International students acquire many valuable skills that employers are seeking in new recruits.

Studying in the US will open up more opportunities for your child's international career. Even if your son or daughter wishes to return back home after graduating or to move to a totally different country, they will have a good starting point to launch an impressive career. In one recent survey, almost two thirds of employers said they gave greater professional responsibility to candidates with an international background.

In one recent survey, almost two thirds of employers said they gave greater professional responsibility to candidates with an international background.

Some of the qualities that employers value in international students include: multilingualism, confidence, the ability to work independently, curiosity, problem-solving, cross-cultural competencies, and the ability to work well in a team. Experiencing a different education system and a new approach to learning might seem difficult at first, but it will help your child learn how to adapt to new situations and become more confident.



Final points to remember

How to Support Your Child to Study Abroad in the US
www.TopUniversities.com

It's clear that you want to make sure your child has the best experience throughout the whole process of studying in the US. Here are some final points to remember to ensure everything runs as smoothly as possible for them – and also for you!

- Plan well in advance and discuss each step of the process with your child. If you make this a joint project you can work on together, you'll both worry less.
- Remember your son or daughter is also anxious about this big change in their life, even if they don't always show it. Support them by staying calm and positive, encouraging them to keep trying, and offering advice when they need it.
- The internet is your friend! Any time you need more information, get online. From official university websites to student forums, there's a world of useful information out there.
- Once your child is ready to start their amazing journey abroad, you may be tempted to start shouting from the rooftops. But try not to show off too much!



More questions?

Need more information? Ask a question in our [online forums](#), and sign up for a free place at the next [#StudyinUSA virtual event](#).