

2008

Student Guide U.S. Universities in 3,357 Words



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Introduction

Following the success of HappySchoolsBlog.com, I have been thinking of providing a short guide that will help students who are planning to studying in U.S. Deciding to take the GRE exam is first step for the longer journey in your life, your career.

Applying to Graduate Schools is a time consuming process. If you know what to expect during GRE preparation, TOEFL, college selection and cost of education it will make your job much easier. This Students guide was written with that one aim to make things simple and easy. I tried to keep it short and filled it with enough information to get you going.

Happy Schools Blog contains information from my personal experience from the last 10 years. I have been in constant touch with students from different universities and when I talk to them, I collect as much information about the school they attend. Then, I write based on that information about current situation in schools. I have put together some exclusive contents in this guide that will supplement information from the blog.

Why e-Book?

I have been writing [Happy Schools Blog](#) since July 2007 and so far there are 290 Posts and 20 Pages of contents. But, average visitor to Happy Schools Blog spends less than 5 minutes. In that time frame it's hard to get access to all the important articles.

This e-Book will provide information in an organized way. In this first edition, I am covering details from GRE preparation to getting student visa.

Why attend schools in U.S.

You need to ask this question to yourself before you decide to study in U.S. Here's possible reason you could decide to study in



U.S.

Cost of Education

I have written couple of articles that explains about tuition fees for University of Houston at Clear Lake and cost of living for day to day expenses that includes Rent, Phone bill, Food, Groceries, Health Insurance and other items.

- [Tuition Fees Breakdown](#) (with sample I-20)
- [Monthly Expense for a student](#)
- [Student Living Expense](#) – Detailed Version

Above 3 articles will give an idea of how much it would cost to study in U.S. Also, choice of universities will affect the cost of education. Studying in University of Southern California located in Los Angeles would cost students \$700 per month in living expenses, where as studying in University of Texas at Arlington would cost less than \$350 per month for living expenses. I have seen students who spend only \$175 per month in living expenses.

My roommate, literally didn't have any money to afford to pay the expenses in U.S. but he sold all the properties, his family had to come here, paid the tuition fees using credit card loan, managed to get scholarship and right now he paid off all the loan and enjoying life here in U.S. with good salary. It took him 2 years to repay the entire loan.

When to start preparing for GRE

The first step in applying to Graduate Schools- starts studying for GRE (Graduate Record Examination). Buying Barron's GRE book is good place to start.

Take GRE by Aug 2008, if you are applying for Aug 2009 - 1 year in advance.

Scoring 700 - 750 in GRE Quantitative section is much easier than scoring more than 400 in GRE Verbal. To help students to get started and to give an exposure on what to expect in GRE, I have written at least 30 articles.

GRE is one of the major requirements for getting admission into Graduate School. There are few universities where GRE is not required. If you are curious to know why universities require GRE score, I would suggest reading [3 reasons why GRE Score is important](#).

Now, you know why GRE Scores are very important for any graduate school. Next step is to know [how to prepare for GRE Exam](#). 10 steps I have listed are based on my experience and from those who scored more than 1300 in GRE Exam. So, the bottom lines to improve GRE Scores - understand your weakness and spend more time preparing strategies to improve weak area.



There are lots of free online materials available for GRE. But, instead of spending time searching for good materials, you can buy both [Barron's and Kaplan's GRE Books](#) for the reason listed the article.

How GRE Exam Score is calculated

One of the important things one has to learn while preparing for GRE is to know how GRE Exam is scored; having that knowledge will give you an ultimate edge to study for GRE in the most effective way. Article on [How GRE Exam is scored](#) will give you a complete idea. Once you know how GRE Exam scoring system you can use that knowledge in effective way

- Higher value questions have higher needs more time allocated to solve
- Understand your weakness and improve your score
- Improve the problem solving speed

Days before Actual GRE Test Date

Having spent long time preparing for GRE, it's good to know how much you can expect to score in actual GRE Exam. In the 10 steps to prepare for GRE, I have said, take ETS Power Prep exam 1 week before actual GRE Test date. That will help student to find how much score to expect in actual GRE Test.

After observing so many students take GRE, I have put together an article that will explain in detail about [GRE Score Range Calculator](#).

On GRE Exam Day – What to expect

Relax!

If you stay calm usually you will do well in the exam. You might have prepared well, but if tension creeps in first few questions, and then GRE score goes down.

So, relax, take deep breath and observe your surrounding and get acquainted with the exam cube. To relax, I usually observe my breathe pattern. i.e. watch how you inhale and exhale the air for 2 minutes, it will calm down the thoughts.

At the end of exam, you will have choice to forward GRE Scores up to 4 universities at end of the exam. You can actually save \$80 if scores are forwarded to the same 4 schools if you plan to apply there.

Graduate Schools Selection

There are so many universities in U.S. to apply for Graduate School admission. This is where most of the student has hard time selecting Universities to apply. Without much exposure about Universities, admission requirements, [average GRE Scores](#), student usually tend to make mistakes like

- Applying to school well below their academic profile
- Selecting the wrong choice of location

I do certainly know the process is difficult, unless students know what to expect and how to select universities. I have put together lots of article explaining University Selection and also listed average GRE scores for few universities.

Along with that, I have answered questions about University Selection based on students GRE, TOEFL and other academic credentials. To make the process easier, I have put together [12 step processes to select universities](#) based on your academic profile.

I can say, it's not a magic button, where student can put in the profile details and they get the list of universities. Its hard work and time has to be spent in researching Universities. It's your life, why do you want to put the decision making process in some else hand?

You can learn about the [Graduate School Admission process](#), explained in flowchart. As you can see, how streamlined the process is.

Choice of University today changes Life tomorrow

Yes, that's right, your life and life style is 100% depended on choice of University you plan to apply. How much money you make, how much exposure you get towards Education, all depends on the choice of the University you plan to apply and attend.

Here's list of articles that will help student to understand more about U.S. Universities

- [12 Step University Selection Process– Part 1 and 2](#)
- [University and Department Rankings](#)
- [How to search for Graduate Schools](#) (different approach)

Apply to Universities – Right way

Selecting Universities is major task, but to get admission, there are so many things that the student can do, so that the application stands out from rest of the students. It's a major misconception about GRE Scores related to admission. Almost every student I talk thinks, having Low GRE score will lower the chance of getting admission.

Graduate Schools Admission documents – Checklist

- 1) GRE Scores
- 2) TOEFL Scores
- 3) Academic Transcripts
- 4) Recommendation Letter
- 5) Statement of Purpose
- 6) Resume
- 7) Paper Presentation Abstract
- 8) Project Descriptions
- 9) Copies of certificates
 - Sports
 - Leadership Skills
 - Tem Work
 - Debates
 - Volunteer Activities
 - Community Services

Graduate School Admission Decision – Major Factors

Each and every credential plays a major role in getting admission. If students have low GRE score, then strong [recommendation letter](#) and higher academic credentials will make up for it. So, does the statement of purpose.

You could have completed a project, which a specific professor might be working on. So, low GPA and GRE score will be compensated because of one's specific project work or paper presentations.

So, a student have to make sure all the documents sent has right amount of information that will make the job easier for the admission committee.

In order to give a different perspective, I put together an article which contains answers from different department admission requirements, on [how GRE Scores are used for admission](#) and how much importance Graduate School Admission committee gives to GRE Scores.

Statement of Purpose (College Essay)

Students can express their personality through statement of purpose. With 2 pages, all the creativity, accomplishments, research potential can be expressed. Don't try to copy the statement of purpose. It's very easy to identify if the statement of purpose was prepared by student or copied from someone's content.

Express Personality

If your score is verbal is 300 and TOFEL is less than 70 and submitting a well crafted statement of purpose, definitely raises a question. Also, writing score in GRE Analytical section will show the writing skills.

Here are some articles that explain how to draft and craft a statement of purpose, including tips from graduate school professor.

- [Statement of Purpose](#) with lots of Samples and tips from professor
- [12 Tips to write high impact SOP](#)
- [Questions about drafting College Essay](#)
- [How to be Original – Draft your own Statement of Purpose](#)

Resume

Resume explains student's academic achievements and skill sets. Good resume should have following characteristics

- Easy to read
- Visually appealing
- Contact information clearly presented at top
- Skills consistent with objective described using keywords
- Education listed in reverse chronological order
- Job Experience lists
- Extra Curricular Activities

[Resume writing tips](#) and [28 questions about resume](#) will give a good idea on how to prepare a resume that will create good impression about you.

Guide to write email to professor to secure admission

Not all professors respond to emails they receive from students about admission. Remember, they are busy people, who will not have time to read boring and lengthy emails. They will receive 100's of emails from students. So, if you were to highlight your case, then you will have to follow the email writing guidelines listed by a professor.

In the following article professor has some harsh words to student who send email asking for some form of aid or admission to graduate school. I strongly suggest every student to read the article – [Writing Email to Professor – Think Again.](#)

Scholarship

Financial Aid is available in 3 forms

- Scholarship
- Teaching Assistant Ship
- Research Assistantship

Usually if academic profile of the student is very impressive, universities will give admission with Scholarship. With scholarship, student will get In State Tuition fees ([difference between In state and Out of State tuition fees](#))

Majority of the students don't get admission with scholarship. Students have to spend at least 1 semester to get some form of funding. In mean time they can work up to 20 hours on campus jobs to pay for living expenses.

Student Visa Preparation

After getting I-20 from Universities, it's time to prepare for student visa interview and stamping. When attending student visa interview, you got to have all the [original documents](#) and know what to expect during the interview.

During the visa interview process, Visa officer in American Consulate look for 3 important things

- Does the student have an academic capability to complete the studies in U.S.?
- Does the student have enough financial resources to afford the cost of education in U.S.?
- Does the student have interest to study in U.S. or got admission for the sake of entering U.S.?

Student Visa Interview

Visa officers are trained personnel's who can find lots of information about you in less than few minutes time. If student has some form of scholarship, then it makes the job much easier. Because, U.S.

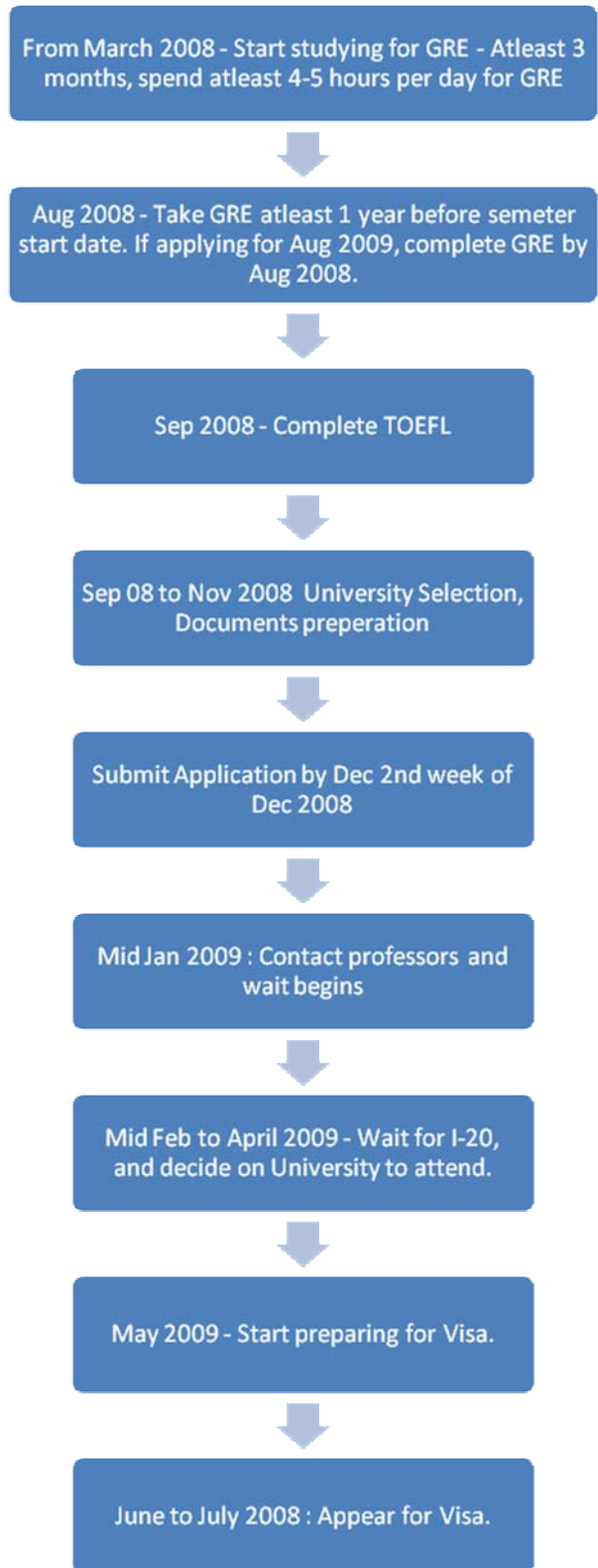
University have recognized the academic achievement and have given scholarship and also that reduces the amount of money student has to show as proof for bank balance.

Here are some of the articles that will explain in detail about bank balance requirements, how to face the interview, sample bank documents and what happens when students submit fake bank documents.

- [Tips to get F-1 Visa, but no tricks](#)
- [Bank Statement for Student Visa](#)
- [How much bank balance is required for student visa](#)
- [F1 Visa Cancelled due to Fake Bank documents](#)
- [Bank Balance for student with scholarship](#)
- [Original Documents used for Student Visa Interview](#)
- [Bank Statement is required for 3 years?](#)

Timeline – GRE Preparation to Student Visa

I have been thinking of creating a timeline that will include when to start preparing for GRE, GRE Test date, Application process, admission decision and student visa.



Following flow cart will explain the timeline to apply to graduate school and it's the best case scenario. It's always better to apply as early as possible.

Universities have separate deadlines for considering the application for Scholarship and regular application deadline. Usually, International students have early deadline when compared to students who are already in U.S. and Domestic students.

In the above case, I said about applying for schools by Dec end. If you plan to apply for high profile schools, they will have deadline in Nov 2008 or so for Fall 2009 semester. So, it's important to be aware of deadlines.

There are many students who plan to take by Dec 2008. Thos students can apply till Feb 2009, but choice of universities will be limited. But, students can still apply.

Other Topics of Interest

This e-book gave an introduction to U.S. Universities admission process and what to expect. I plan to write couple of more e-books that will be related to life of students in U.S. and how to adapt to U.S. culture which would include what student will go through from the day they enter into U.S. till they find a job.

In other e-book, I will give introduction to job search techniques that worked for me, how to negotiate salary, benefits and immigration issues relayed H1B visa and OPT.

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If you have any questions or comments, please free to send me an email. I look forward to hear from you.

Links to other interesting articles

- [Students Spending Habits](#)
- [36 Questions – Right After landing in U.S. airport](#)
- [My first week in U.S. – Pleasant one indeed](#)
- [Students Laptop Buying Guide](#)
- [5 Common questions about Universities – by students](#)

Frequently Asked Questions

1) I have taken GRE twice; will both scores get reported to Universities, if so which score will Universities consider for admission?

It doesn't matter how many time you take GRE, all the scores will be reported to the school and it will appear in the GRE Score Sheet. Universities might take the best scores for each section from different test scores or sometimes they might take average of all the scores reported.

2) How many times can I take GRE?

I have seen students take GRE for 2 to times, but taking GRE twice in 2 months time is not going to improve your score by much. Remember, GRE is computer adaptive and questions have been tested over years before it appears in the actual test.

Research by ETS has shown, GRE scores doesn't change much by appearing for GRE twice in 2 months. Spend at least 3 months time between exams. It might improve your GRE score.

3) Can a student complete M.S. without getting any form of financial aid?

Yes, that's possible too, but it's unlikely. Students will usually find some form of income. It could be from part-time job at least.

4) How much will part time job pay?

Student can work only on-campus for only 20 hours per week. On campus jobs pay \$7 to \$10 per hour, which will pay for monthly living expenses.

5) Do you know anyone who came back to native country, since no job was available after M.S.?

I haven't seen anyone who went back to India or to their native country after graduating. Its easy to find job here, but you got to put in efforts. Searching for job, it is a full time job.

6) How much can someone who just graduated from schools earn?

This is the most common question every student asks before applying to U.S. To get an idea on how much Software Engineers make refer to [Average Salary for Masters Degree](#)

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