

# SHAHEEN PAKISTAN

---

Module: Further Study in the United States



<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>3</b>
GENERAL INFORMATION	3
Which programs or specializations are most popular/renowned?	4
MOTIVATION TO APPLY TO THE USA	4
OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM	5
EVENTS	5
MISCONCEPTIONS	5
<b>UNDERGRADUATE STUDY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>POSTGRADUATE STUDY</b>	<b>11</b>
DIFFERENT KINDS DEGREES	11
HOW TO PREPARE FOR A GRADUATE-LEVEL DEGREES	12
APPLYING	<b>12</b>
OVERVIEW	12
FEES, FUNDING AND SCHOLARSHIP	<b>14</b>
FEES	14
SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS	15
<b>GENERAL INFORMATION</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>(Applicable to all Applicants)</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>BUDGETING</b>	<b>16</b>
APPLYING FOR A VISA	<b>17</b>
ACCOMMODATION	<b>20</b>
GENERAL OPTIONS	20
<b>CONTRIBUTORS</b>	<b>21</b>

## GLOSSARY

Term	Meaning
College	Generic term that refers to any post-secondary undergraduate institution. Often interchangeable with “university”.
Common App	The centralized application system through which you can apply for an undergraduate degree in more than 650 universities. For a dictionary of terms within the Common App, make sure to visit <a href="#">this link</a> .
Course	A subject taken during a semester of your degree.
Freshman	A first-year student in an undergraduate program. First-year high school students are also referred to as Freshmen.
Graduate School/Study	This is the level of study that follows undergraduate degrees. It includes Master’s and PhD level study. It is the same as the term ‘postgraduate’.
In-state Universities/Out-state Universities	This is more relevant to students living in the US. One way that such students differentiate between different universities is checking whether these are situated within the US state they are currently living in (in-state universities), or whether they are in another state (out-state universities). For international students, it is useful to know that schooling systems, processes and environments are likely to vary across states and so there are some factors to consider when choosing amongst programs in different locations. For information of the kind of factors students in the US tend to consider, <a href="#">click here</a> .
Junior	A third-year student in an undergraduate program. Third-year high school students are also referred to as Juniors.
Senior	A fourth-year student in an undergraduate program. Fourth-year high school students are also referred to as Seniors.
Sophomore	A second-year student in an undergraduate program. Second-year high school students are also referred to as Sophomores.

# INTRODUCTION

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Currently, the USA hosts the world's largest population of international students in the world, as well as more than 4,500 higher education institutions to choose from. The USA is renowned for post secondary education because there is a large number of extremely respected colleges and universities there. This country profile is going to help you understand why so many people may go to the USA, and how you can get there.

### **Which programs or specializations are most popular/renowned?**

Some of the most popular undergraduate and postgraduate programs for higher education in the USA are as follows:

- Medicine
- Law
- Engineering
- Computer Sciences
- Business and Management Studies
- Economics and Econometrics
- Public Policy
- STEM programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics programs)

Note that there has been a positive trend towards humanities subjects in recent times as well, particularly within undergraduate students going to the USA from Pakistan.

## **MOTIVATION TO APPLY TO THE USA**

### **Diversity**

Since there are so many international students in American universities, you will find people of many different cultures and backgrounds during your studies. A lot of universities have clubs and societies specifically for Pakistanis as well, which could make it easier to adjust there as a student.

### **Variety of Campuses**

Due to the large number of universities in the country, there is a large variety in types of campuses as well. You can usually find the following types of educational institutions:

- **State/Public Universities:** These universities are subsidized by the US government, and are usually highly connected with the cities and states that they are situated with. These universities typically have the largest amount of students and offer hundreds of different

programs. They also usually cost a lot less than private universities and so are a popular choice for international students.

- **Private Universities:** These are institutions funded privately, mainly through tuition fees, donations, and research grants. These universities have a reputation for their academics and high standards in terms of facilities and faculty. Likewise, they are a more expensive option in terms of tuition fees.
- **Community Colleges:** These are community-based institutions that work closely with employers, secondary schools, and other community groups. They can be private or public. They are important because they offer 2-year associate degrees and are often seen as a “gateway” into higher education (more information about what an Associate’s degree is can be found in the Undergraduate Study section under “[Types of Degrees](#)”) — a lot of students do two year Associate degrees and then go on to public or private universities to complete their undergraduate education.

### **Job Prospects**

Job prospects after graduation tend to be limited for international students, and it is important to realize that only students with outstanding academic achievements are likely to get good job opportunities, as opposed to average students. Jamal Hussain (counselor at Aitchison College for USA applicants) advises students to start working on getting a job as early as Freshman year, if they are getting their undergraduate degree in the USA. If enrolled in an institution in the USA, make sure to meet career counselors and prospective employers and follow their guidelines as early as possible. Summer internship programs are also very useful for improving job prospects. However, permit restrictions should be kept in mind.

If you only have a Pakistani passport and don’t get a job offer in the USA, you will have to return to Pakistan. Even if you do get a job, the company will have to sponsor your visa to allow you to stay in the US. Getting a work permit with a Pakistani passport may be difficult but can be worth trying for. Nonetheless, if you want to work in the US, there is no harm in applying; various avenues of doing so while studying or after graduation can be viewed in the visa section.

### **OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM**

Across the United States, the American schooling system is usually followed. In short, students attend twelve years of school. These years are typically divided into “elementary school” (Grades 1-5), “middle school” (Grades 6-8), and “high school” (Grades 9-12). High school usually consists of students having to complete a certain number of credits in order to graduate after Grade 12; once they graduate, they receive a diploma/certificate that makes them eligible to pursue further education. Other schooling systems (such as the IB) are also followed in certain schools.

## **EVENTS**

Many universities do university fairs in Pakistan -- they send representatives to answer student questions. You should keep an eye out for such fairs (they usually occur at universities, but may also occur in expos etc. too). Additionally, many universities have offices in Pakistan, which you can visit if you have any queries. To find out more about this, you can ask your prospective university if they have an office in Pakistan.

## **MISCONCEPTIONS**

### **Grades and Courses**

- *Specialization requirements*
  - One misconception is that you must have some academic background in the field you are applying to (i.e similar A level courses or relevant courses) – this is not necessary for undergraduate programs. If you have a good academic record, that is usually sufficient. Mathematics and English tend to be relatively more important than specific fields.
- *Need for creativity*
  - Instead of focusing entirely on achieving the highest grades, make sure that you cultivate your interests and be innovative in what you choose to study. This will improve learning potential for future higher education, and will give you a better chance in getting admission into a university in the USA.
- *Ivy leagues and grade requirements*
  - Ivy leagues have a high criterion for grades in that they **expect** applicants to have good grades (good grades are a prerequisite so they don't make you stand out). In addition to high grades, you should also have strong extracurriculars. You should still try to get good grades, since university admission requirements and cut-offs exist, however, your focus should not be limited to this. Good grades also tend to matter more for competitive degrees or contribute in giving you a competitive edge, but they aren't the only important component of your application.
- *Consistency when preparing for tests*
  - In Pakistan, students usually put more effort in achieving good grades in external or final exams, as opposed to internal exams or tests taken during the academic year. This is not the case for most students in the US, according to Jamal Hussain (counselor at Aitchison College for USA applicants). US students, class 9 onwards (high school in US terms), maintain more consistency when studying or working for different test components throughout the year.
- *Grades are **not** easier to get in the US*
  - As compared to the UK, the US has more regular exams during their academic year. UK undergraduate and postgraduate programs tend to have fewer exams or test components than the US. It is not necessarily easier to get good grades in the US.

### **College/University Accreditation vs Professional Accreditation**

- Accreditation is particularly important when applying for a visa; when you apply for a visa, you must give reasons for why you want to study at a particular university. The campus or nearby family (or similar reasons) are not good enough reasons. It is important to mention that a college is accredited otherwise it is unlikely that you will get a visa.
- A good reason for applying to a program is that it has professional accreditation. Note that:
  - **College/university accreditation** is for all programs within that college/university
  - **Professional accreditation** is when professional associations visit the program, check it out and give professional accreditation to that particular program.
- Also note that accreditation is also a good way to narrow down options for study.

### **Gap Years**

- A gap year can be a great idea if used wisely. Work with someone for practical experience, if the person is working on a field you are interested in, for example.

### **Political instability - Fear of discrimination**

- Campuses typically have to follow non-discrimination laws so you shouldn't worry too much about this. Students in the US usually work to support their degree and are preoccupied with personal issues as opposed to active discrimination. If you are still hesitant, try to apply to areas that have a high Pakistani population.

### **Complications when moving abroad**

- Moving abroad is difficult. You need to know how to look after yourself - tasks such as washing your clothes to budgeting - before you shift to the US (or any country for that matter).
- The lifestyle in the US is significantly different to Pakistan. Learn about the culture or lifestyle there before moving or at least be open-minded/prepared for a possible cultural shock.

### **Teacher involvement**

- In Pakistan students tend to rely on teachers (or tuition centres as an alternative) during their studies. When studying higher education in the US, you have to be more independent in your study patterns. Teachers do not handle every aspect of your work. Some examples include the following:
  - You have to proactively look for a job yourself by visiting career counsellors and contacting potential employers etc.
  - You will be expected to use the library and other resources provided by your higher education institute to self-study.

### **Interviews**

- Students tend to assume that interviews will be conducted online, through some form of video call etc. This is not always the case, particularly for the US, which has university representatives

or potential interviewers in many main cities across Pakistan. Higher education institutes may decide on whether the interview will be online or in person depending on where you live.



## **UNDERGRADUATE STUDY**

For information on undergraduate study, please [click here](#).

## **POSTGRADUATE STUDY**

## **DIFFERENT KINDS DEGREES**

<b>Level of Education</b>	<b>Types of Degrees</b>	<b>Duration and Structure (Full time programs)</b>
Master's	Academic/Research	1-2 years
	Professional	1-2 years
	An Academic/Research Master's degree typically leads to a Doctorate level degree or a career in academia or research. Professional Master's degrees help to train students for a specific profession.	
Doctoral	Doctorates	4-6 years

## **HOW TO PREPARE FOR A GRADUATE-LEVEL DEGREES**

In order to be eligible for a graduate degree in the USA, you must have an undergraduate or graduate degree. Your undergraduate degree needs to be at least **four years** long. Two to three year Pakistani degrees are NOT accepted into graduate programs in the USA. If you have done a 2-3 year degree, you may have to attend another year or two years of university at an American institution before you can apply for a Master's or PhD.

Note: if you have completed a 3-year bachelor's degree from the UK (or Europe), your degree will likely be acceptable by the universities in the US. However, you will need to get equivalence -- WES will do this for you and determine whether your degree is accepted or not. This equivalence is required for all degree types, not just those from Europe (but also from outside Europe).

### **Subject Specialization**

Although subject specialization did not matter a lot for undergraduate admission ,but it can be important for graduate admission, depending on the field and degree you are going for. If you are applying for a PhD, you sometimes need to have relevant experience and previous enrollment in a course that is related to the subject wish to study at a doctoral level. Note that this is more often a requirement for STEM subjects. For Master's, it also depends on the degree and field you are going for.

# APPLYING

## OVERVIEW

Unlike the undergraduate application process, there isn't a centralized system used for postgraduate applications. You are required to apply through the specific university website of your preferred program. This section talks about what you need for a typical postgraduate application and how you can go about the application process.

### **Application Components**

The following components are typically required during your postgraduate application into any program:

- **Standardized Tests.** In the US, this is the current common way of quantifying competence of students. The significance of such scores tends to vary according to program and institution, but generally aim for good standardized scores to improve the overall quality of your application. The following are the most commonly used:
  - Graduate Record Exam ([GRE](#)) — for humanities, arts, and science programs
  - Graduate Management Admission Tests ([GMAT](#)) — for business schools
  - Law Schools Admission Test ([LSAT](#)) — for law schools
  - Medical College Admission Test ([MCAT](#)) — for medicine
- **Essays/personal statements.** Contrary to undergraduate personal statements, postgraduate statements are more oriented towards academic life than personal life. Here you elaborate on your academic and professional work background, with less emphasis on narratives/stories of your life (although these can improve your personal statement if used in moderation, and if used well).
- **1-3 letters of recommendation.** For postgraduate degrees, the content of these LORs should be more focused towards your academic and research traits/accomplishments. Additionally, if you have any publications, these are valued in postgraduate application; LORs mentioning this are stronger.
- **Proof of English language proficiency:** this can be done through a suitable university transcript, TOEFL or IELTS score.
- **Research essay samples/proposals** (depending on the program).

### **The Application Process for Graduate Programs**

- When applying to graduate programs, there are multiple steps that typically take place.
  - a. Firstly the admission looks at standardized scores and academics to shortlist candidates.
  - b. Then the shortlisted applications go to the relevant department for evaluation.
  - c. The department head then sits with advisors (universities have advisors assigned to various geographical locations e.g. Middle East) and the Dean to discuss who gets accepted.

- When selecting schools for graduate study, research the Dean and his expertise, interests etc. and see how they align with yours. If your interests connect, write/contact the dean and talk about how you are impressed with their work and link it with your expertise/past work. Relate the work they have done to Pakistani issues and how you are interested in this – ‘I would like to work with you’, ‘I am considering applying to your university’. In this way, he knows who you are even if he hasn’t seen your application. This makes you an attractive candidate and can give you an edge when you are applying.

### **Application Cycle**

Graduate schools have a less uniform cycle and timeline compared to undergraduate programs, but generally if you want to apply for Fall admission into a university, you will find that applications open around August-September, and can be due any time between December and March of the following year. Universities will notify you of your decision between March and April, and you will typically need to reply with whether you accept the admission by May at the latest. Fall sessions start from August-September.

## FEES, FUNDING AND SCHOLARSHIP

### **FEES**

Your tuition fees will depend highly on what type of program or subject you go for in your postgraduate degree. Typically, you will have to pay within the range of **\$25,000 and \$50,000**. If you do a degree in the Social Sciences at a public university, you will pay on the lower side of the range. If you opt for something like medicine, business, or engineering and do so in a private university you should expect to pay a figure at the higher end of the scale, or even beyond it. For more information on living costs, see the Budgeting subheading in the General Information section of this profile.

### **SCHOLARSHIPS AND GRANTS**

<a href="#">Fulbright Scholarship</a>	The Fulbright Foreign Student Program enables graduate students, young professionals and artists from abroad to study and conduct research in the United States at U.S. universities or other academic institutions.
<a href="#">Aga Khan Scholarship</a>	The Aga Khan Foundation provides a limited number of scholarships each year for postgraduate studies to outstanding students from developing countries who have no other means of financing their studies. Scholarships are awarded on a 50% grant : 50% loan basis through a competitive application process once a year.

Besides these, there are a number of scholarship opportunities in the US, but these options are typically available on a university-by-university basis when you are applying and if you get accepted. Make sure to look carefully for opportunities within schools when you are deciding where to apply.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

**(Applicable to all Applicants)**



## BUDGETING

As an international student, you will have to account for a lot of costs besides just the tuition fees. These include:

1. Travel expenses
2. Health and travel insurance
3. Accommodation and living expenses
4. Travel and sightseeing in the USA
5. Textbooks and other course materials
6. Food and drink
7. Miscellaneous

Once all of this is accounted for, the **average annual living costs (minus the tuition fees)** typically ranges between \$10,000 to \$17,000 (figures from 2018). Where your costs will lie on this range depends on the city/state that you are in. [Here](#) is a list of US states ranked according to affordability and living costs.

## APPLYING FOR A VISA

### **DO YOU NEED A VISA**

- If you wish to study in the United States and are a citizen of a foreign country, you must have a student visa. If you are planning to attend a university or college, you will need an **F-1 visa**. If you wish to go for a vocational program or to study at a recognized non-academic institution, you will need an M-1 visa. For more information on the types of visa, click [here](#).

### **WHEN SHOULD YOU APPLY**

- After your prospective school accepts your enrollment, you will be registered for the SEVIS (Student and Exchange Visitor Information System). You will need to pay the SEVIS I-901 fee. The school will then issue you a Form I-20.
- After receiving the Form I-20, you can apply at a US Embassy/Consulate for a Student F-1 visa. Make sure you present this Form I-20 in your visa interview.

### **HOW MUCH DOES IT COST**

- I-901 SEVIS Fee F visa application: \$200 (2018 cost)
- Visa fee: \$160 (or PKR 20000, 2018 costs)

## **HOW LONG CAN YOU STAY IN THE US**

F-1 visa holders may be eligible for 12 months of OPT (optional practical training) after completion of their study program and all its requirements. For more information on OPT, view the section outlining the OPT below.

If you take a break in studies of five months or more, you may lose your F-1 status.

## **HOW TO APPLY**

1. Complete the [DS-160 form](#) (Nonimmigrant Visa Electronic Application)
2. Pay the visa fee (you may find more information on the fee [here](#)). In Pakistan, you can make the payment in person at any branch of Allied Bank of Pakistan.
3. Visit the US Embassy or Consulate at the stated date and time for your visa interview. You will need to have certain documents for the interview. The requirements of these can be found here. Check the [How To Apply](#) section.

## **VISA REJECTION - REASONS**

- Visa rejection usually occurs when candidates do not do fill out forms properly. Do not leave things blank in your documents just because they seem unimportant — the smallest of errors could cost you your visa.
- Otherwise, finances and funding are very important when applying. It is important to make a finance sheet which includes information such as the following:
  - 'Funding for my son/daughter', where parents fill out a funding sheet about how they will support your degree
  - Include brackets/incomes from areas such as:
    - Savings
    - Rental properties
    - Scholarships
    - Semester division – how you will fund each semester.

### **Other important tips:**

- It is important to show the **flow** of income – that is what they look at. Not lump sum of money. They need to see that you have a good regular flow of income.

## **WORKING IN THE USA**

### **Working while studying**

You are typically allowed to work while on a student visa. With this visa, you can usually work part time for up to 20 hours per week. Do note, that you can work full-time during summer vacations or extended

breaks, and you are usually not allowed to work off-campus. There are some exceptions to this rule, such as if you are under extreme financial hardship that you are unable to control, and get authorized by the Designated School Official to work outside of campus. This is however, extremely rare and not something to rely on.

A lot of universities and colleges will let you work on campus in the following capacities:

*For Undergraduate Students:*

- You can work on campus in libraries, cafeterias etc - usually off-campus work is a lot more difficult to find.

*For Postgraduate Students:*

- Teaching Assistant
- Research Assistant
- Administrative Assistant
- Course Grader

If you have been on the F-1 student visa for nine months or more, and are doing well academically, then you may be eligible for **Curriculum Practical Training (CPT)**. The CPT exists for programs that require you to work as part of your degree. For example, you may have to do an internship as part of your degree requirements. In this case, you will have to first secure an internship related to your degree and then apply for a CPT. For more information on the CPT, you can visit the link [here](#).

**Working in the USA after graduation**

<b>Optional Practical Training</b>	
<b>General Information</b>	<p>After you have completed your degree, you are allowed to work in the USA for up to 12 months as part of your <b>Optional Practical Training (OPT)</b>. There are two types of OPT:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. Pre-completion OPT.</b> You can only apply for this after you have completed a year of studies. If you get this OPT, you can work 20 hours per week while your school is in session. You can do 40 hours per week during summer vacations or extended breaks.</li><li><b>2. Post-completion OPT.</b> You can apply for this after you have completed your studies. With this you can work both part-time or full-time.</li></ol> <p>The OPT in general has the following conditions:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Your work needs to be directly related to your degree</li><li>● If you availed the CPT for 12 months, you are not eligible to apply for the OPT</li><li>● It can typically only last 12 months in total, and all your months from both Pre and Post completion OPT count towards one total.</li></ul> <p>For more information, visit the link <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
<b>For STEM Program Graduates</b>	When students specialize in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, they are allowed to work 18 months after graduation. They tend to encourage females to apply. For more information on STEM subjects, <a href="#">click here</a> .
<b>H-1B Specialty Occupations</b>	
The H-1B is a nonimmigrant visa that gives graduates temporary employment authorization in high-skilled occupations. H-1B applicants are required to have specialized knowledge and a bachelor's degree or higher or its equivalent. Most H-1B jobs are in industries such as science, engineering, and information technology. For more information, visit the link <a href="#">here</a> .	

# ACCOMMODATION

## **GENERAL OPTIONS**

There are a number of accommodation options you can look into when planning your study in the United States:

1. [Campus housing](#)
2. University-owned, off campus housing (your prospective school/program will be able to help you find accommodation)
3. Off campus housing (can be found by browsing through verified student accommodation providers, university/city-based FB groups etc.)
4. Homestay accommodation

Most undergraduate programs might actually require their students to live on campus for at least their first year, in the student dorms. If you want to live off-campus in your first year (and have permission to do so), you can begin your search as soon as you get admission. But do note: in many cities, you might not be able to check availability until 30 days before the date you plan to move in.

Campus housing might be more expensive, but with off-campus housing, you might have to manage utility bills, cost of furniture etc. on your own.

Here are some links to help you find places of residence on your own:

- <https://www.student.com/us> (you can search housing options by college/city/neighbourhood, and select the kind of housing and facilities you want)
- <https://www.moveha.com/> (specifically for international students looking for off-campusing housing -- for both long-term and short-term purposes; you can even search your school directly on this website, and find housing close to campus)
- <https://www.homestay.com/united-states>

## CONTRIBUTORS

This information was compiled with the valuable help of SHAHEEN volunteers. The contributors to this tip-sheet include the following people:

- [Ali Nomani](#) - Harvard University

We thank our volunteers for their contribution, and hope their tips and advice will help you in your application.

In addition to that, the following sources were consulted in developing this country profile. We encourage you to consult these sources for additional information and guidance.

[Times Higher Education](#), [Fulbright](#), [Top Universities](#), Education USA (1) (2), [IBO](#), [College Board](#), US Government, [Save the Student](#), [Prospects](#)