

Overview of Post-Secondary Education System in the US

美国的高等教育系统

There are three types of post-secondary institution: Universities, Community Colleges, and Other Non-degree-granting Institutions. It should be noted that in the US context, the terms **colleges** and **institutes** are in no way inferior to **universities**. As a general rule, colleges tend to be smaller and usually offer only undergraduate degrees, while universities also offer graduate degrees.

在美国有三种高等院校：大学，公立学院，和不授予学位的院校。值得注意的是，在美国，公立学院并不比大学低一等，他们的区别是：公立学院通常更小，只授予本科学位；而大学除了本科学位外，还授予硕士和博士学位。

Within each college or university, the term **schools** is used to refer to a school of a specific academic area, for example, the school of arts, or the school of business.

在每个学院和大学内，一个“院系”代表一个专门的学术领域。例如艺术系，商学院等。

Universities 大学

Universities in the US have two principal mandates, teaching and research. Most university professors are expected to devote a portion of their time to both of these functions.

美国的大学有两个使命：教学和研究。大学教授通常会用部分时间教学，部分时间研究。

Currently, there are about 5,000 universities in the US. The US does not have a central government office that approves educational institutions. It relies on a system of voluntary accreditation carried out by non-governmental accrediting bodies to ensure that schools meet standards. However, there is no legal requirement that degree-granting institutions be accredited or hold a particular form of accreditation. Because of this complexity, quality of education may vary from university to university. There is also great variation in terms of course requirements for identical programs of study.

目前美国有 5000 所大学。美国没有一个特定的政府机构来审核这些大学，所以，

大学的审核和认证是由非政府的认证组织完成的。然而，没有法律规定这些院校需要通过审核。由于这种复杂性，不同大学的教学质量参差不齐，甚至同等专业的课程要求也有很大区别。

Nevertheless, most US colleges and universities draw on the same set of standardized admissions tests as a part of the application process. These standardized tests, namely SAT, SAT Subject Tests, and American College Test (ACT), are primarily multiple-choice aptitude tests that are intended to measure the skills required for success in undergraduate study. Colleges and universities in the US generally use these tests to assess all applicants (from the US or other countries) against the same standard. On the other hand, with the increasing globalization of education, more and more universities no longer impose SAT or ACT as an admission requirement for international applicants (especially from countries such as China, where SAT and/or ACT test centers are not readily available). For example, California State Universities do not generally require SAT or ACT from international applicants.

尽管如此，绝大部分大学还是会使用统一的标准化入学考试作为录取要求，即 SAT 和 ACT。这些考试以选择题为主，以衡量学生是否拥有在高等院校学习的能力。美国的高等院校通常会用这些考试来比较国内和国际学生。但是，随着教育的全球化，很多大学（例如加州州立大学）开始不再需要国际学生（尤其是中国学生）提供 SAT 或 ACT 成绩。

An attractive feature of the US higher education system is that students can transfer from one college to another midway through a degree. The flexibility of the credit system at US universities allows credits earned at one institution to be recognized by another, provided certain criteria are met. However, due to the vast range of course and program offerings, and the freedom given to each university in setting up their own requirements, transfer admission can be just as competitive as freshman admission.

美国高等教育系统的一个特殊之处是学生可以在不同院校之间转学。灵活的学分系统使学生在一所院校取得的学分可以被另一所接受（需满足某些条件）。然而，由于课程种类繁多而且要求不一，中途转学可能和直接申请新生入学一样难。

Also, universities usually impose a residency requirement for degree completion. In essence, students are required to register and complete a certain number of credits, ranging from 25% to 50% of the program of study at the graduating institution. Before considering transfer from one institution to another, students should spend sufficient time and effort in researching the possibility of credit transfer and finding out the residency requirement of a graduating institution.

大学通常会规定在最低在本校完成的学分。也就是，学生至少要在欲毕业院校完成

25%-50%的学分（通常对应1-2年），才能在本校拿到毕业文凭。学生应在转学前用足够时间研究好转入院校的最低本校学分规定和可转入的学分。

Community Colleges and Non-degree-granting Institutions 公立学院和不授予文凭院校

Community colleges, sometimes called **junior colleges** or two-year colleges, are community-based institutions providing two-year **associate degree** programs as well as technical and vocational programs to the community. There are more than 1,200 community colleges in the US. Unlike US universities, community colleges do not usually make standardized admission tests as an admission requirement, though each has its own set of admission requirements.

公立学院，也叫做社区学院，是基于社区设置的两年制学院，提供两年制副学士学位和职业技术课程。美国有1200多所公立学院。不同于大学，公立学院通常不以标准化考试作为入学要求，但每个学院都有自己的入学要求。

Transfer of credits is possible between two colleges, and from a junior college to a four-year institution. All these are dictated by articulation agreements between two schools, or adopted within a college system. Generally, public community colleges work closely with the public universities in their state to develop transfer guidelines. Because of the established credit-transfer system in place between community colleges and 4-year universities, community colleges represent a viable alternative as a stepping stone towards degree completion. First of all, the tuition at community colleges is so much cheaper generally. Many of them only charge a few thousand dollars per year. This is also a more personal environment which makes it easier for international students to adapt and to adopt to a new country. Community colleges have guaranteed admission arrangements with 4-year universities. For example, California State Universities usually have a TAG (Transfer Admission Guarantee) arrangement with community colleges in California.

通常两所学院之间，或者从学院到大学，学分都是可转的。两所学校之间，或者一个大学系统内，通常都会有转学分协议。因此，公立学院是进入四年制大学的一个可行的途径。首先，公立学院的学费远低于大学的学费，通常每年只需要数千美元。公立学院也是更私人化的环境，有助于国际学生适应在新的国家的生活。有些学院和大学有保送协议。例如，加州的大学系统大多和公立学院有保送协议。

Technical and vocational colleges train students in a specific vocation or

technology leading to a certificate or diploma. There are several thousand colleges of this kind across the country, and they may be private or public institutions.

技术和职业学校训练学生在某一特定的职业的技能，并颁发职业证书或文凭。美国有数千所职业技术学院，部分是公立，部分是私立。

Institutional Accreditation 院校认证:

Regional Accreditation (ie Recognition by one of the six regional accrediting bodies):

- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools
- New England Association of Schools and Colleges
- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools
- Northwest Association of Schools and of Colleges and Universities
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools
- Western Association of Schools and Colleges

Regional Accreditation is the highest form of institutional accreditation, such accreditation is automatically recognized by other countries (such as the National Ministry of Education of China).

地区性认证：由以下六个组织认证：

- 中部各州院校协会
- 新英格兰院校协会
- 中北部院校协会
- 西北部院校协会
- 南部院校协会
- 西部院校协会

地区性认证是美国最高等级的院校认证（美国教育部不处理大学认证），地区认证也被其他国家自动承认（包括中华人民共和国教育部）。

Program-Specific Accreditation 专业学科认证:

For certain professions, program-specific accreditation is important. In some cases, it means that the captioned programs have gone through further scrutiny and assessment.

For example:

AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business) accredits business programs. Business programs that are AACSB-accredited are more respected than those that are not.

ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology) has the mandate to accredit engineering and technology programs.

ACBSP (Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs) is a leading specialized accreditation association for business education, supporting, celebrating, and rewarding teaching excellence.

ACPE (Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education) is the US national agency for the accreditation of professional degree programs in pharmacy and providers of continuing pharmacy education. Its Canadian counterpart is CCAPP (Canadian Council for the Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs).

NAAB (National Architectural Accrediting Board) is responsible for accrediting architecture programs in the US; whereas CACB (Canadian Architectural Certification Board) is responsible for accrediting architecture programs in Canada. Both bodies recognize each other.

对于某些专业，专业协会的认证很重要。很多时候，专业认证意味着该专业经过了严格的审查。部分专业认证协会包括：

商科： Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) 和 Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP)

工科： Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET)

法律专业： American Bar Association

教育专业： National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

药科： Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE)

建筑专业： The National Architectural Accrediting Board

园林设计专业 American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) Landscape Architectural Accreditation Board (LAAB)

传媒专业： The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications

室内设计专业： Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA)