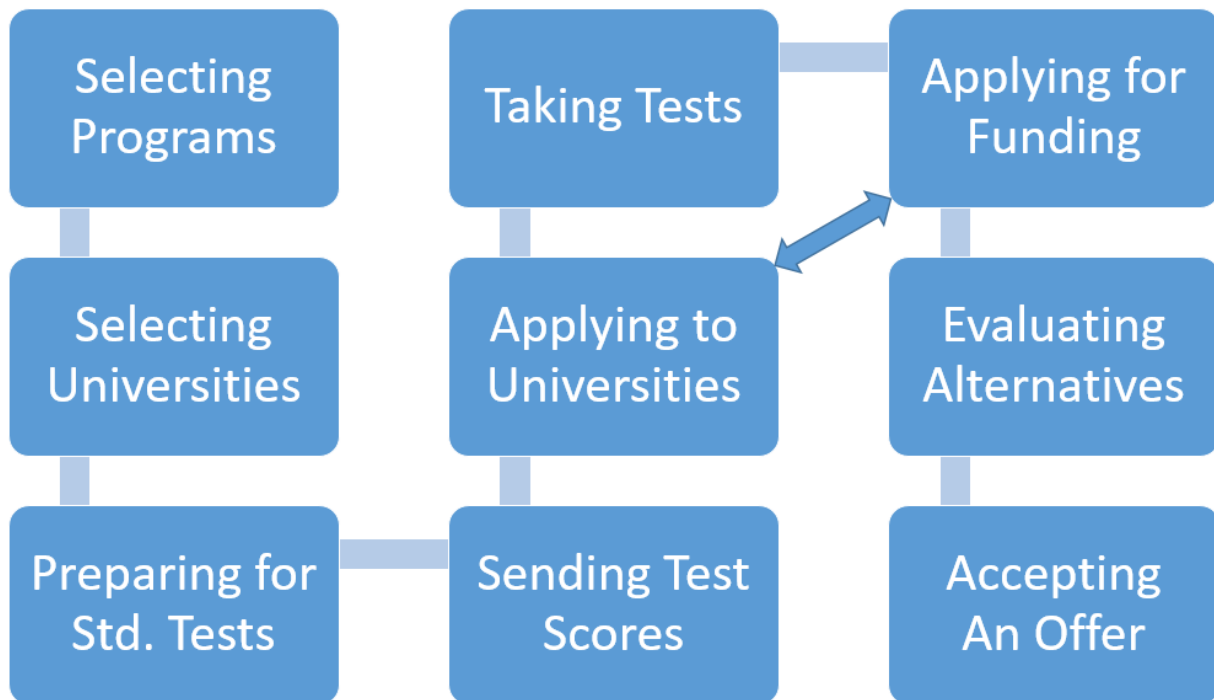


## Process of Admission to Universities in the USA

The process of admission to higher education in the United States is fairly complex and requires a considerable amount of time and resources. The process starts with identifying programs of education (by the student) and ends with accepting an offer from a university willing to admit the student. The process takes between 6 and 18 months, depending on the university and admission requirements. Although the application and admission process is largely continuous, it can be broken into the following major stages:



1. **Selecting Programs:** The journey of higher education starts with identifying the right programs (the Indian equivalent of course). At each level there are multiple types of programs. So one must choose carefully what he/she wants to pursue. For example, at the undergraduate level a student can opt for an associate degree or a bachelor's degree (Bachelor of Arts or BA, Bachelor of Science or BS, etc.) and at the graduate level, one can opt for master's degree (Master of Arts or MA, Master of Science or MS, Master of Business Administration, Master of Social Work, etc.), or a doctoral degree (such as Doctor of Philosophy or PhD, Doctor of Medicine or MD, Doctor of Jurisprudence or JD, Doctor of Business Administration or DBA, etc.). As there are a wide variety of subjects and programs available, students need to be aware of the options available and what they want to pursue.
2. **Selecting Universities:** For any program, there are typically multiple universities one can choose from. In many cases, there are hundreds of universities that offer similar programs. So one needs to narrow down the number of universities, which offer program(s) that satisfies the aspirants' needs and career goals best. Some of the key considerations at this stage are: ranking and reputation of the university, eligibility requirements, cost of attendance, cost of living in the area, and weather.

3. **Preparing for Std. Tests:** Every university either requires or encourages prospective students to take certain standardized tests (such as TOEFL, IELTS, SAT, GRE, GMAT, LSAT, etc.). As these tests are expensive (sometimes costing hundreds of dollars), the students have to carefully choose universities and programs for which they can take the tests and perform well.
4. **Taking Tests:** The tests can be taken from many location in India and other countries. The candidate should choose a test location based on his/her convenience. It is important to take the test early so that one knows his/her score and which universities one should apply to—based on the test scores. While taking the tests are important, one needs to start preparing early. Otherwise, a low score will not benefit the applicant but it will cost monetarily.
5. **Applying to Universities:** The application process is sometimes fairly complex. While every university has its application procedure, most follow similar structure. Some common elements include: academic transcripts, statement of purpose, letters of recommendation, and sometimes other components such as application essays and/or personal statements. Often universities expect to receive students' academic transcripts from previous institutions directly.
6. **Sending Test Scores:** Universities expect to receive students' test scores directly from the testing services. If the student has already narrowed down the list of universities, he/she can opt for sending test scores to a few universities free of cost at the time of taking the test. Sending test scores to any other university(s) subsequently entails additional fees.
7. **Applying for Funding:** One of the most important consideration is funding. The US Higher education is fairly expensive. The cost of education varies widely depending on the university and the city/town where it is located. While in some universities, students need to spend \$20,000 per year, in other universities the cost of a year's education and living expenses can exceed \$100,000. So to take care of these expenses, many students seek scholarships, fellowships, and/or teaching/research assistantships. In some cases, universities consider all students for those scholarships/financial assistance on a competitive basis, in many cases, students have to separately apply for scholarships, fellowships, and/or financial assistance.
8. **Evaluating Alternatives:** Once the application is complete, a student may be offered admission by multiple universities. In that case, the students are free to choose from the available alternatives. At this stage, the key consideration is which university offers the best package and requires the least expenses. So a student must evaluate the alternatives based on the subjects/specializations offered by the program, career prospects, cost of attendance, and the amount of scholarship/financial assistance available.
9. **Accepting an Offer:** Once the students has evaluated all the alternatives, he/she is free to choose admission offer from any university based on the above criteria. Usually, universities require students to accept/reject offers within a certain deadline. In some cases, universities require the students to pay an acceptance fee to reserve a slot so that the students don't reject at the end moment.