



A LESSON ON ENGLISH

American Universities and Colleges by Sara Tusek

Too much information!

Researching this topic revealed a basic characteristic of postsecondary education in the United States—the sheer vastness of the topic itself! As I searched reports, surveys and databases, I became more and more convinced that, in its complexity, variety and size, the American postsecondary system defies any attempt at simplification. Therefore this issue of ALOE will give a few highlights, rather than a comprehensive overview.

University vs. College

From the Merriam-Webster online dictionary:

University: Etymology: Middle English *universite*, from Anglo-French *université*, from Medieval Latin *universitat-*, *universitas*, from Latin *universus*. 14th century.

1 : an institution of higher learning providing facilities for teaching and research and authorized to grant academic degrees; *specifically* : one made up of an undergraduate division which confers bachelor's degrees and a graduate division which comprises a graduate school and professional schools each of which may confer master's degrees and doctorates

2 : the physical plant of a university

College: Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French, from Latin *collegium* society, from *collega* colleague. 14th century.

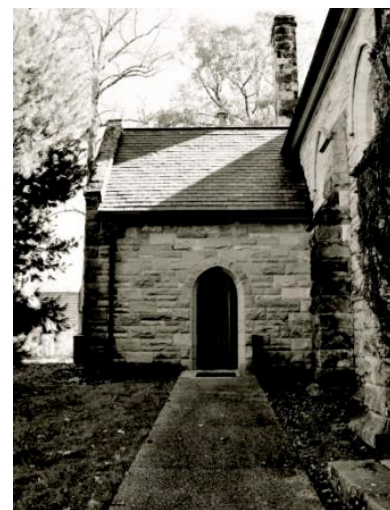
2 : a building used for an educational or religious purpose

3 a : a self-governing constituent body of a university offering living quarters and sometimes instruction but not granting degrees <Balliol and Magdalen *Colleges* at Oxford> —called also *residential college* **b** : a preparatory or high school **c** : an independent institution of higher learning offering a course of general studies leading to a bachelor's degree; *also* : a university division offering this **d** : a part of a university offering a specialized group of courses **e** : an institution offering instruction usually in a professional, vocational, or technical field <business college>

6 : the faculty, students, or administration of a college

In daily use, however, the terms “university” and “college” are used interchangeably. Both can be public or private; both confer degrees to matriculated students who complete all requirements; both can be residential or commuter; both can be religiously affiliated or not; both can be small or huge; both can be urban or rural; both can have local, national or international reputations; both can be accredited or unaccredited; and so on.

In their historical development, colleges and universities differ significantly, having had entirely different foundations, purposes and achievements. Most of the oldest colleges and universities in the U. S. began as religious



The University of the South, courtesy S. Pitman

training institutions (seminaries for men), though most of these have since shed this affiliation entirely or merged with other institutions. Many public universities started as land-grant universities, established on public lands within states with the primary purpose of educating that state's inhabitants. Many public and private schools began as female “seminaries,” training young women to be teachers.

There are also many private colleges and universities which began as trade schools that educate people in science, business and technology. These colleges may offer two- or four-year programs in various trades such as computer technology, secretarial preparation, cosmetology and machinery repair.





Sara and Jarda Tusek with Klaus

“A Lesson on English” is a series of short lessons created for people who want to become fluent in conversational English. The lessons are practical and useful for students learning English in a traditional classroom setting or on their own.

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LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAMS: the majority of U.S. undergrad programs are based on the concept of the liberal arts, which provide a well-rounded academic education that develops verbal, written, and reasoning skills. Students begin their degree by taking a wide variety of courses in the arts, humanities, languages, and the social and physical sciences. They then choose a subject in which to specialize (a major) and take about 25 to 50 percent of their classes in the major area. Students can also take a minor, a secondary specialization that does not require as much coursework as a major; some students take multiple majors and/or minors.

The *Ivy League* began as an athletic conference of eight private liberal arts schools in the Northeastern U.S. The term now has connotations of academic excellence, selectivity in admissions, and social elitism. The Ivy League colleges and universities are *Harvard College*, founded 1636 as New College; *Yale University*, founded 1701 as Collegiate School; *University of Pennsylvania*, founded 1740; *Princeton University*, founded 1746 as College of New Jersey; *Columbia University*, founded 1754 as King's College; *Brown University*, founded 1764 as College of Rhode Island; *Dartmouth College*, founded 1769; *Cornell University*, founded 1865.

SECONDARY DEGREES

- Associate's degrees (AS or AA, two-year programs);
- Bachelor's degrees (BA or BS, four-year programs);
- Master's degree (MA, MS or MEd, two-or-three year programs beyond the BA or BS);
- Doctoral degrees (PhD, EdD, DivMin, etc., seven-year programs beyond the BA or BS with a dissertation);
- Post-doctoral studies add further certifications, licenses and specialties in particular areas.

ADMISSIONS: when institutions consider students for admission, decisions generally examine the following:

- Academic success in secondary school.
- Scores on standardized tests (SAT, ACT, TESOL).
- Recommendation letters from teachers.
- Student-written essays.

- Demonstration of leadership potential.
- Participation in extracurricular activities.
- Music or theater majors usually have an audition.

COST OF HIGHER EDUCATION: For the 2009-2010 academic year, The College Board reported the following average annual tuition (this does not include fees, books, room and board or any other incidental expenses):

- Four-year, Private Institutions: \$26,273.
- Four-year, Public Institutions: \$7,020.
- Two-year, Community Colleges: \$2,544.

FINANCIAL AID: many students work part-time to help pay for their studies, while others also receive grants, scholarships and loans to help meet expenses.

- More than half of all U.S. undergrad students receive some form of financial aid, as do 60 percent of all grad students.
- Scholarships and grants are generally awarded by a variety of nongovernmental organizations, as well as by states.
- The largest single source of such student financial aid is the federal government, which provides more than \$73 billion a year in grants, loans and work-study assistance.

STUDY ABROAD AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: more than 170,000 students earn academic credit each year through study at institutions in other countries.

- The top five destinations for undergraduate students are the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France and Australia.
- More than 550,000 international students study at U.S. colleges each year.
- The top five countries of origin for undergraduate students are China, India, Japan, South Korea and Canada.

America's variety of post-secondary institutions of higher education offers an enormous range of possibilities. From 2-year certificate degrees in technical areas to more than 23,508 graduate programs (at the Masters' and PhD level) at 2,356 universities and colleges, there's a program for everyone in the USA.