
TRUSTED SOURCES: SEEKING ADVICE ON APPLYING TO UNIVERSITIES IN ANOTHER COUNTRY



NACAC

National Association for
College Admission Counseling

A Guide for Students and Parents

Deciding to pursue higher education in another country, researching and applying to universities, and selecting an institution to attend can be both exciting and overwhelming. **This guide describes the advisors who can help you through the admission process.**

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Who Can Help?

Many individuals and organizations offer students guidance on researching and applying to universities in another country. Understanding who these individuals and organizations are and what support they provide will help you make educated choices about who can help you.



High School-Based Counselor or University Advisor

- A qualified professional employed and paid by a high school to help guide your university search and application process.
- Provides unbiased advice about university options and admission processes, including those in other countries.
- Typically a student's best advocate during the admission process.
- Often serves as the designated individual for sending official academic records to universities.

TIP: If your school does not have a counselor, consider working with one of the other professionals described in this guide. Your school principal or administrator should be able to help you send official academic records and complete school forms required as part of the university application process.

University Recruitment or Admission Officer

- A salaried employee of a university who advises and recruits international students and reviews applications.
- Provides specific and accurate information about the university they work for and details about that institution's application requirements and admission process.
- Can reliably help you gauge your qualification for admission based on the academic profile of previously admitted students.

TIP: University websites are another good source of reliable information for prospective students. Many universities have a dedicated section for international students on their websites.

Government-Supported Advising Resources

- National government-supported advisors or websites that promote the country's universities.
- Services include helping you research university options, hosting visits by traveling representatives of universities, and running education fairs.

TIP: Start by contacting the consulate or embassy of the country where you want to study. Consulates and embassies may have a department, office or employee dedicated to education matters.





Independent Educational Consultant

- A professional hired and **paid only by students and their parents** for personalized advice on the university admission process, financial aid, and career possibilities. An option for students who may not have a school-based counselor or are seeking additional assistance.
- Independent from high schools and universities; they are not contracted or paid by these institutions.
- Exposes you to a *full range* of higher education options so you can identify the universities that meet your academic and personal goals.

TIP: Many independent educational consultants belong to professional organizations, such as the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), Independent Educational Consultants Association (IECA), or Higher Education Consultants Association (HECA). Membership requires consultants to demonstrate an advanced level of education, relevant experience, and adherence to professional standards and ethical principles.

International Student Recruitment Agency or Agent

- A company (agency) or individual (agent) contracted and **paid by universities in other countries** to advise and recruit students to those institutions.
 - Usually, the agency/agent is paid by its partner university *only if and after* a referred student enrolls and begins taking classes. This payment is often a percentage of a student's tuition fees, or a flat rate, and is called a commission.
 - Most likely to recommend universities they represent. May also be able to help you apply to universities that are not their partners.

TIP: If you are considering an agent's services, ask to see a list of their partner universities. It is important to choose an agent who represents a diverse set of regionally accredited or recognized universities. This will help ensure you find a university that meets your academic and personal goals. You can find more detailed advice about agents on pages 4-6.



This guide is intended to help students interested in pursuing an undergraduate degree program. In many countries, such as the United States, undergraduate degrees are offered at both colleges and universities. This guide uses "university" to refer to universities and colleges.



GET TO KNOW AN AGENT

These questions can help you identify a reputable agent. Select an agent who follows high-quality practices; avoid an agent who does not.

High-quality practices are signs that a company or individual may have the knowledge and skills to guide you through the university application and admission process.



For information on organizations engaged in agent quality assurance, visit www.nacacnet.org/InternationalStudentGuide.

WHAT TO ASK AN AGENT	 HIGH QUALITY PRACTICES	 LOW QUALITY PRACTICES
What is your background and professional experience?	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Has many years of experience and/or relevant education and training. ✓ Adheres to principles of good practice, a code of conduct, or other ethical guidelines. ✓ Possesses a proper business license. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Has limited experience and education, and has not completed professional training. ✗ Does not share the principles that guide their business practices. ✗ Cannot provide proof of business licensure.
Can I see a complete list of your university partners?	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides verifiable evidence that they represent regionally accredited and recognized universities. [See page 6.] ✓ Clearly describes their relationships with partner universities, including the degree levels and academic programs for which they recruit. ✓ Explains they are compensated by their university partners, and the basis of this compensation. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Claims to have a partnership with a particular university but cannot show proof. [See page 6.] ✗ Does not share details about their financial relationship with that institution.
Since you are paid by the universities you represent, do I also have to pay a fee for advisement? [See page 6.]	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Honestly and clearly describes all the services they provide and the associated fees. ✓ If you enroll at one of their partner universities, does not require you to pay for advice about the university admission process. ✓ Does not require you to give them any of your financial aid or scholarship award. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Presents you a bundled package of services and does not clearly outline what is being charged for each service. ✗ If you enroll at one of their partner universities, expects you to pay a fee for advisement on the application process in addition to the commission payment they receive from that university. ✗ Requires you to pay them part of your financial aid or scholarship award in exchange for helping you obtain funding.
Do you use rankings to help me identify potential universities?	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ May consider rankings as only one factor in the university research and selection process. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Relies excessively or entirely on rankings when advising you on university research and selection. ✗ Charges higher fees to help you enroll in more highly-ranked institutions.
Do I need to complete a contract with you before you begin advising me on the university application process?	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If charging you advisement fees, requires you to sign a contract or service agreement that clearly states what you are paying for. ✓ Allows you to ask questions about a contract, may consider changes to the contract, and gives you adequate time to carefully review and understand what you are agreeing to. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ If charging you advisement fees, pressures you to quickly sign a contract or service agreement without giving you adequate time to review it. ✗ Begins advising and asking for payment before terms of service are established and a contract is signed.
What if I want to use your advisement services but I plan to apply to a university that is not your partner?	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ If clearly stipulated in your contract, advisement fees can be charged. Or, you may be referred to another agent that partners with that particular university. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Discourages you from applying to universities that are not their partner institutions.
Do you guarantee admission to a university with which you work?	<p>HIGH QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ No. Explains that universities are responsible for making admission decisions, and that they cannot guarantee you will be admitted to a particular institution. 	<p>LOW QUALITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Yes. Guarantees admission to a particular university even though admission decisions are made at the sole discretion of the universities.

Report Low Quality Behavior

If an agent engages in low-quality behavior, you should report them to the university they represent. Contact the admission office or the international student recruitment officer for your country.



Pay extra attention to practices with this mark. They may result in:

- Your application being rejected from consideration.
- Your admission offer being revoked.
- You being expelled once enrolled.

WHAT TO ASK AN AGENT	HIGH QUALITY PRACTICES	LOW QUALITY PRACTICES
How do you keep up with changes to academic programs , admission requirements, and application processes at your partner universities?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Has visited the campuses of partner universities. ✓ Receives regular trainings from and is in frequent communication with their partner universities. ✓ Can identify a point of contact at their partner universities. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Has never visited the campuses of partner universities. ✗ Has limited contact with the universities. ✗ Is unable to identify a representative at the universities with whom they work.
How do you support students in completing university applications ?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Helps you understand what is expected of you throughout the application process. ✓ Assists you in compiling the required materials. ✓ Provides editing guidance with essays and personal statements. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Offers to complete part or all of the application for you, which may include writing the essay. ✗ Offers to alter your academic records or make other false claims on your behalf. ✗ Prohibits you from directly communicating with universities. Offers to create and monitor an email account used to communicate with universities.
Will you help me prepare for tests required for admission?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Assists you in identifying a reputable class or online program to help you prepare for required tests. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Offers to take tests for you or have someone else sit in for you.
How will you interact with my high school ?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Supports your relationship with your school-based counselor or academic administrator and helps you work effectively with him or her. ✓ Works with your school's designated authority to ensure that your authentic academic records are sent to universities. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Does not want you to tell your school-based counselor or academic administrator that they are assisting you with the university admission process. ✗ Falsifies your academic records and/or forges recommendation letters on behalf of your teachers or other high school officials.
How will you help me select the university I will attend?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Helps you identify the best university for you, even if that means attending a university that is not one of their partners or changing schools once you arrive in your destination country. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Requires you to accept an admission offer from one of their partner universities. ✗ Requires you to forfeit your right to move to a different university once you arrive in the host country, or pay a financial penalty for doing so.
Can you help me apply for my student visa ?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provides proper advice on immigration matters related to studying in your destination country, or can refer you to appropriate and authorized sources of accurate information. ✓ Helps you prepare for a student visa application or interview by familiarizing you with common interview questions. Emphasizes the importance of honest and authentic responses. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ Offers to help you obtain a student visa for purposes other than overseas study, such as illegal employment or immediate immigration. ✗ Gets someone to sit in for you for a visa application interview or sits with you and helps you during the interview.
Can I speak with your past clients ?	HIGH QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Yes. Offers to introduce you to several past clients so you can learn more about their experiences. 	LOW QUALITY <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ No. Refuses to put you in touch with past clients.

VERIFYING AN AGENT'S UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS

There are several ways to verify an agency's claim that it officially represents a specific university. First, check the university's website for a listing of its agent partners. If you cannot find this list, contact the university directly. Email the university admission office or the international student recruitment officer for your country. Contact information can usually be found on the university's admission website. A sample email message:

Dear Admission Officer:

I am an international student from [country name] who is interested in applying to your university. I am considering having [agency name] assist me with the application process and am writing to verify that [agency name] represents your university. I would appreciate it if you would please confirm this for me.

Sincerely,
[Your name]



TIP: Even if a university has a partnership with an agent, you are not required to use that agent to submit an application for admission.

Furthermore, admission decisions are made at the sole discretion of the universities.

IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT AGENT PRACTICES

Avoid Agents Who “Double-Dip”

Some agents may charge you for advice *while also* being paid a commission by their university partners for recruiting you. This is called “double-dipping” or “dual agency.” If the agent is being paid by universities to recruit students, the agent's advice to you may be influenced by these business relationships. Ask yourself, “Are my needs and interests the agent's top priority?” Because of the potential for conflict of interest, it is best to avoid agents who engage in this practice.

Know What You Are Paying For

Some agents charge students fees when providing advice about applying to universities that are not their paying partner institutions. This is an acceptable practice as long as the terms of service are clearly outlined and understood.

The agent may also charge for additional services, such as English language and test preparation classes, help applying for student visas, and travel arrangements. Unlike double-dipping for application advisement, charging for these services is common.

Just as some agents offer additional services, some test preparation and academic tutoring companies also offer university admission counseling. Multiple services tied together for one all-inclusive fee are called bundled services. If you are offered a bundled service package, make sure all services are properly explained so you understand what you are paying for.

Understand Language Program Options

Many students begin their studies in another country by enrolling in an intensive language program. There are many program options, with a wide variety of names, such as intensive English programs (IEP), foundation courses, bridge programs, or pathway programs. These preparatory courses offer students the opportunity to increase their language ability to the level necessary to begin formal degree studies, among other benefits. Many agents represent and recruit students for these language programs.

If you plan to begin studies in a preparatory language program, it is important to understand that the time you spend in it—and the associated costs—may *add to* the time and costs of your degree program. Also, an agent should not guide you to one of these programs if you are already eligible for direct admission to a degree program on the host campus.



“There is no standard equation to solve when it comes to selective college admission. It’s a complex process—and different—on each campus. In every crowd I meet, I see those who want to tackle applications like a ‘game’ that can be ‘won’... But, it is much more important to understand that the admission office is taking a long-term view of your success at the university. They are less interested in whether you pleased the initial application reader and much more concerned about whether you will be able to add to the campus community and progress successfully to graduation.”

— Amy Jarich, *Assistant Vice Chancellor & Director of Undergraduate Admissions*,
University of California, Berkeley

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES: WHAT UNIVERSITIES EXPECT FROM YOU

Universities have expectations about how you should prepare and submit your application for admission and apply for a student visa. You have the responsibility to:

- Research, understand, and comply with the admission policies and procedures of each university.
- Be the sole author of your applications. If your materials are not authentic and consistent, admission officers may quickly reject your application.
- Be aware of and abide by the student visa regulations for the country where you will study.



The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC), founded in 1937, is the premier membership organization of university admission and counseling professionals. More than 14,000 college counselors, admission officers, and independent educational consultants from around the world are NACAC members and are dedicated to serving students as they make choices about pursuing higher education. NACAC is committed to maintaining high standards that foster ethical and social responsibility throughout the admission process. NACAC is a not-for-profit, non-governmental association.

“As a long-time member of NACAC, Harvard applauds this critically important new publication for international students and their families.”

— William Fitzsimmons, *Dean of Admissions & Financial Aid*,
Harvard College, Harvard University (MA)

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