



## FULBRIGHT COMMISSION

*Commission for Educational Exchange between  
the United States and Sweden*

*Nämnden för svensk-amerikanskt forskarutbyte*

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### HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

The term "higher education" is used to indicate studies beyond secondary school (*efter gymnasieskolan*). It includes two-year community or junior colleges, four-year colleges, universities and professional schools. Admission to higher education usually requires the completion of upper-secondary school (*gymnasium*) or the equivalent.

In general, the terms "college" and "university" are used interchangeably. A college can be defined as an institution of higher education that offers four-year programs of undergraduate study leading to a bachelor's degree (similar to, for instance, a *fil kand* or *civilekonomexamen*), or two-year programs leading to "associate degrees" (no Swedish equivalent).

Institutions with two-year programs are referred to as junior or community colleges. They can offer academic as well as vocational programs, are less competitive, have later deadlines for application and may have lower tuition charges. Most two-year schools do not offer housing.

A university is a collective institution that usually includes one or more four-year undergraduate colleges (schools), a graduate school awarding master's and doctoral degrees in the humanities, the arts, the social and natural sciences, and graduate professional schools (for instance in dentistry, engineering, law, medicine, and veterinary medicine).

During the four years of a college or university program leading to a bachelor's degree, the student is known as an undergraduate. The student is classified according to the year of study: first year--freshman, second year--sophomore, third year--junior, fourth year--senior. Some bachelor's degrees require five years of undergraduate study, e.g. programs in architecture, art, and engineering.

During their first two years at college, students usually follow a general program of courses in a variety of fields. Many of these courses are compulsory for all undergraduate students regardless of the final area of specialization (major). Some compulsory courses could be American history, American government, English composition, mathematics, a second language, and physical education. American undergraduates study several different subjects simultaneously during an academic term, as opposed to the Swedish university approach of studying one subject at a time. The purpose of the first two years of general study is to help the student decide the area of study in which to specialize and to complete the general course requirements for graduation. Before beginning their third year of instruction, students select their major, and the majority of the course work during the last two or three years is in this or related fields.

In setting up requirements for diplomas or degrees, most colleges and universities measure the quantity of study by credit hours. (Some universities in California still use a system with units instead of credits.) Each hour of attendance at a course, each week, for one semester or quarter, gives the student one semester or quarter hour of credit. Thus a course which meets three hours a week for one semester gives a student three credits. The average undergraduate student takes 12 to 16 credit hours per semester or quarter.

The quality of work done by a student in a course is recorded at the end of a term in the form of a letter or number grade. The grade is based on the student's performance on short examinations (quizzes), midterm examination, final examination, participation in class discussions, and written papers during the term.

The following is a list of letter grades, the degree of proficiency and quality points each represents:

Letter grade	A	B	C	D	F
Degree of proficiency	Excellent	Good	Average	Passing	Failure
Quality points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0

Examinations are generally written rather than oral, and short examinations are given at intervals during the term. Written papers are also part of the course work. A final examination is given at the end of the course. At the end of the four-year program, many institutions require a comprehensive examination covering all aspects of the major field.

The study pace at American universities is generally very high. Furthermore, deadlines for homework and reports are not negotiable and tests cannot be retaken!

Certain professional programs such as dentistry, medicine, law and veterinary medicine can be started only after a student has obtained a bachelor's degree. Many of the schools of dentistry, medicine, law and veterinary medicine do not accept international students into their first professional programs.

Schools offering chiropractic education require two years of university study before a student can be admitted. Many programs in physical and occupational therapy can only be started after a bachelor's degree. A teaching certificate requires a year of study after the bachelor's degree.

*The Swedish Fulbright Commission was established in 1952 by an executive agreement between the Swedish and U.S. governments. Its primary objective is to promote mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Sweden through grants to outstanding Swedish and American graduate students, lecturers, and researchers and through information on higher education in the United States.*