

STUDENT LIFE IN THE USA

By Perlekar Tamtam Ph.D, P.E.

Most of the students come to the United States of America (USA) with lots of hope, and thinking that USA is a land of opportunities. Yes that is true, but they will know they are going away from the land of affection and love.

This article will help you to know about student life in the USA. Most of the students will be received by a member of Indian Student Association (ISA), or similar organization once a new student (you) reached the airport at their University. ISA will provide shelter and food for you at least a week. After a week stay you will know most of Indian Students, so you can easily find a room, and roommate. Believe me you are going to have very hard time mentally for the first one week of your stay in the USA, don't panic during that time, try to spend first one week of your stay with your native language speaking people. You will gain a good amount of knowledge about the job opportunities, classes, and the University within a week of your stay at the University, by the way in the US, Universities are called Schools.

Requirements to get master's degree in the USA:

Credit hour: One credit hour is nothing but attending a one hour (In academia one hour is equal to 50 min.) in person class per week, and spend another 2 hours on that subject out of the class time in that week. A typical semester is for 15 weeks, so you are expected to spend 45 hours in the whole semester for each credit hour. As an international student you have to take minimum 9 credit hours each semester, there are some exceptions listed below, you need to take 30 to 36 credit hours to get master degree in the USA. Most of the subjects are 3 credit hours, some might be a 4 credit hour classes, and so get a master degree you may need to take up to 12 subjects.

There are three options to get a master's degree, first one is course work option, in this case you can graduate by taking all the required credit hours (mostly 36, it varies by school) by taking the subjects, there might be some additional requirements varies by department. Second one is project work option. In this case you need to take 30 credit hours' worth of course work and 3 credit hours' worth of project, and the last option is Thesis, in this case you need to take 24 credit hours' worth of course work and six credit hours' worth of research work. Project and Thesis options you have to work with a faculty to move forward in a research work. Master degree will take 18 months to 30 months depending upon school and your adviser. To get a bachelor's degree a student needs to finish 120+ credit hours.

On campus job opportunities:

There are 4 types of job opportunities available on campus. As a master student you are allowed to work 20 hours per week on campus during the semester and 40 hours during the summer time. In most of the schools it is not much difficult to get student assistance ship, but it might be hard to get it in the first semester, most of the students will have an on campus job for couple of semesters.

Student Assistance (SA):

There is no fee waiver so you are going to end up paying full out of state tuition fee, at this point out of state tuition fee is around 1000 dollars per credit hour in 2019, and as an international you have to take 9 credit hours. You are allowed to work 20 hours per week. Depending upon the job most of the students make between 500 dollars to 800 dollars per month in 2019.

Graduate Assistance (GA):

If a student has a GA position he will end up paying instate tuition fee, which will be 1/3 of out of state tuition fee. This job is totally a contract job you will get paid around 3,000 dollars stipend per semester in 2019. You are allowed to take 6 credit hours per semester if you hold this position.

Graduate Research Assistance (GRA):

These positions are available at a professor, this job is also a contract job, and student will get paid around 4,000 dollars stipend per semester. Most of the jobs need to work more than 20 hours, but the pay is for only 20 hours. You need to do Research work under a professor guidelines. Student will end up paying instate tuition fee. You are allowed to take 6 credit hours per semester if you hold this position.

Graduate Teaching Assistance (GTA):

These positions are available in a department. This is also a contract job, and you will be assisting undergraduate students in the lab or grading their homework assignments. You will end up paying only 1/6th of out of state tuition fee, and also you will get paid around 3,000 dollars stipend per semester. School fee will be 1/6th of out of state tuition fee. You are allowed to take 6 credit hours per semester if you hold this position.

Classes and semester:

Most of the classes will be 75 minutes long, and meet twice a week, (We don't need to go to class all day and everyday) If you are taking 9 credit hours, then you need to attend 9 hours of in person classes per week, and you may need to spend studying 18 hours per week on those topics. Depending upon professor of the class you might have 3 (spread in a semester) exams, and/or projects. Here in schools Professors will assign homework assignments. It will carry mostly 10% of the total marks. Your final grade in that class will be assigned by that class professor, there won't be any board exams at the end of the semester, but class professor might give you one, and you have to start studying from day-1 to pass the class. Most of the schools follow semester system, and there are three semesters. Fall semester; starts in August ends in December, second one is spring semester; starts in January, ends in May. Last one is summer semester; shortest one, starts in first week of June and ends in last week of July. International students need not to enroll during the summer semester.

Social Security Number (SSN):

SSN is a unique number it will carry all your history in USA. To get SSN you must have an on-campus job. In Most of the schools it is not difficult to find an on campus job before you leave the University. It is similar to our Aadhar card.

Housing and dorms:

Most of the international students stays off campus since it is a lot cheaper compared to on campus stay. 3 to 4 students' stays in a typical 2 bed room apartment, and it might cost you around 500 to 700 dollars in Wichita, it varies from university to university.

OPT/CPT:

Your VISA helps you to get into the USA, once you are in the USA, your VISA has no value until unless you wanted to visit India, you need to maintain the legal status by enrolling the classes and maintain the 3.0/4.0 GPA. You are eligible to take CPT after one year studies in the USA if you find any suitable

opportunity in your field of study outside of the university, you are eligible to take 12 month OPT after graduating from school, and it is extendable to another 18 months if you are working in your field of study.

Important note: All the dollar amounts mentioned here are based on 2019 expenses, and they vary based on the place and year after 2019.