



**GUIDE**  
**TO THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**  
**IN THE UNITED STATES**

BY

ANTONELLA CORSI-BUNKER

**ISSS** | International  
Student & Scholar  
Services  

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

## COMMONLY USED ACRONYMS

- ACT** American College Tests: an assessment taken by students as a precursor to college/university admission
- AP** Advance Placement: A program that enables high school students to complete college-level courses for college placement and/or credit.

### **A.A., A.S., or A.A.S.**

Associate Degree: A degree earned upon completion, usually of a two-year program, at a community college or junior college; students with an associate degree may continue on a for a bachelor's degree or may enter the work force.

- B.A.** Bachelor of Arts degree: A four-year, or more, university degree similar to a B.S., but with a higher concentration of general coursework in the liberal arts. B.A. degrees are more common in humanities and arts and at liberal arts colleges and universities.

- B.S.** Bachelor of Science degree: A four-year, or more, university degree similar to the B.A. but with more concentration in the specific major. B.S. degrees are more common in hard sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, etc.)

**Campus** The grounds on which a university is located, and the buildings of the university. Most U.S. universities, except a few in large urban areas, have distinct areas of land for their campuses in which all their facilities are located and in which students can easily walk from one building to another (such as walking from their dormitory to a classroom or cafeteria).

**College** Higher education *above* the level of secondary education (unlike in many other countries, in which "college" is synonymous with secondary education for ages 14-17). College and university are often used interchangeably to refer to any institution of higher education. Generally, a college is smaller or has fewer areas of study than a university. Community college and junior college are terms reserved for two-year institutions leading to the associate degree.

### **Community College**

A junior college established to serve a certain community and sometimes supported in part by it, often emphasizing career, rather than academic, programs.

**CBS** College of Biological Sciences

**CLA** College of Liberal Arts

### **Co-Op Programs**

"Cooperative" programs are university programs in which students alternate periods of traditional classroom study with practical training in their major field/program. Various models exist; one common model would find students taking classes in one term and then spending the next term off-campus working at a company, under supervision, on projects that relate closely to the major study program.

- CPT** Curricular Practical Training: Employment authorization that a school's Designated School Official (DSO) can grant to students on F-1 visas for work that is integrally related to their program of study. CPT is often used to allow students engage in required internships, cooperative education, practicum, or other types of "in-the-field" work experience prior to completion of studies. F students interested in CPT must consult with their DSO.
- CUA** At the University of Minnesota: Coordinator of undergraduate advising (a non faculty professional adviser in large departments such as English, Psychology, Sociology, etc.)
- DGS** At the University of Minnesota: Director of graduate studies
- DUS** At the University of Minnesota: Director of undergraduate studies
- DTP** (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis/whooping cough), 4 shots total, given at age 2 months, age 4 months, age 6 months, and age 15-18 months
- DSO** Designated School Official: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's term assigned to one or more university staff members who are responsible for managing issuance of forms and keeping records of all international students on F (student) visas. The DSO is charged with updating government database records and signing documents verifying that the student is maintaining status. The DSO is the proper contact for any question or problem related to the F (student) visa.
- ECFE** Early Childhood Family Education
- Ed.D.** Doctor of Education: In general, the highest degree obtained in academics or education (other than "postdoctoral" studies available in some fields, which does not usually lead to an extra or higher degree being granted).
- EM** Education Minnesota (previously MEA; Minnesota Education Association)
- ESL** English as a Second Language. A program model that delivers specialized instruction to students who are learning English as a new language.
- FRL** Free and Reduced Priced Lunch. Children qualify, based upon parent or guardian financial status, to receive either free or reduced priced lunch through a federal governmental program.
- FT and PT**  
Full Time and Part Time
- GLBT** Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender
- GPA** Grade point Average
- GT or TG**  
Gifted and Talented

- Hep A** (hepatitis A), 2 shots total, given at age 12-23 months. Doses are given 6-18 months apart. MCV4 (meningococcal conjugate), 1 shot total, given at age 11-12 years.
- Hep B** (hepatitis B), 3 shots total, given at birth, 1-2 months after first hep B, and age 6-18 months. If child did not have these 3 shots previously, then he will be required to have them before enrollment in grade K-12.
- Hib** (Haemophilus influenza type b), 4 shots total, given at age 2 months, age 4 months, age 6 months, and age 12-15 months
- HS** High School
- IB** International Baccalaureate
- IDEA** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This federal law, reauthorized in 2004, is designed to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.
- IT** Institute of Technology
- K-12** Kindergarten to twelfth grade
- M.A.** Master of Arts Degree: Graduate study pursued after the undergraduate degree is obtained, generally for on-two years. Some doctoral programs require that applicants hold a master's degree before being accepted into a Ph.D. program, whereas some programs accept students directly from undergraduate studies, with the M.A. or M.S. being awarded upon completion of an equivalent amount of study completed during pursuit of the higher doctoral degree.
- MCA** Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments
- MIC** At the University of Minnesota: MinnesotaInternationalCenter
- MISA** Minnesota International Student Association
- MMR** (measles, mumps, rubella), 1 shot total, given at age 12-15 months
- M.S.** Master of Sciences Degree: See M.A. for definition
- MSA** At the University of Minnesota: Minnesota Student Association
- NAEP** National Assessment of Educational Progress: Also known as the "Nation's Report Card," NAEP assesses the educational achievement of elementary and secondary students in various subject areas. It provides data for comparing the performance of students in North Carolina to that of their peers in the nation.
- NCLB** No Child Left Behind. NCLB is the 2002 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and represents a sweeping change in the federal government's role in local public education. NCLB's primary goal is for all public school children to be proficient or above in reading and mathematics by 2013-14. Title I schools that do not meet certain student achievement standards face sanctions under this law.

- OPT** Optional Practical Training: Employment authorization that USCIS can grant to students on F-1 visas to work in the United States in jobs related to their studies, usually done after graduation. OPT can be granted for up to 29 months for graduates of STEM disciplines. F students interested in OPT must consult with their DSO.
- PARA** Paraprofessional
- Pre-K** Pre-Kindergarten, pre-school
- PSEO** Post-Secondary Education Options
- PTA** Parent Teacher Associations
- Ph.D.** Doctor of Philosophy: The Ph.D. generally requires an extensive amount of research with a published thesis or dissertation being submitted, reviewed, and defended after completion of an intense period of formal classroom study.
- PCV** (pneumococcal vaccine), 4 shots total, given at age 2 months, age 4 months, age 6 months, and age 12-15 months
- PSAT** Pre-Scholastic Assessment Test. Normally taken by high school juniors as a practice test for the SAT. Some schools use the PSAT as a diagnostic tool to identify areas where students may need additional assistance or placement in more rigorous courses.
- RA** Resident assistant or research assistant
- RO and ARO**  
Responsible Officer and Alternate Responsible Officer: The U.S. Department of State's term assigned to one or more university staff members who are responsible for management of issuing forms and keeping records of all international students and scholars on J (exchange) visas. The RO is charged with updating government data base records and signing SEVIS documents verifying that the exchange student is maintaining status. The RO is the proper contact for any question or problem related to the J (exchange) visa.
- SAT** Scholastic Aptitude Tests. The SAT is often taken by high school juniors and seniors as a precursor to college/university admission. It assesses a student's verbal, mathematical and writing skills.
- SBE** State Board of Education. The State Board of Education is charged with supervising and administering "the free public school system and the educational funds provided for its support." The Board consists of the Lieutenant Governor, the Treasurer, and eleven members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the General Assembly in Joint Session.
- SEVIS** Student and Exchange Visitor Information System: U.S. government Student and Exchange Visitor Information System used to track and monitor schools and programs, students, exchange visitors, and their dependents throughout the duration of approved participation within the U.S. education system.
- SMI** State Median Income

**TA** Teaching Assistant: Graduate assistant responsible for assisting the main instructor for a course. The duties usually include teaching, grading, meeting with and assisting individual students with difficulties, and administrative work.

**Title I** Title I is the largest federal education funding program for schools. Its aim is to help students who are behind academically or at risk of falling behind. School funding is based on the number of low-income children, generally those eligible for the free and reduced price lunch program. Many of the major requirements in the NCLB federal law are outlined in Title I – Adequate Yearly Progress, teacher and paraprofessional standards, accountability, sanctions for schools designated for improvement, standards and assessments, annual state report cards, professional development and parent involvement. Title I used to be known as Chapter I.

**Title III** Title III is the section of NCLB that provides funding and addresses English language acquisition and standards and accountability requirements for limited English proficient students.

**Title IX** Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 bans sex discrimination in schools receiving federal funds, whether it is in academics or athletics.

### **University**

Higher education *above* the level of secondary education (see college), college and university are often used interchangeably to refer to any institution of higher education. Generally a university is larger or has more areas of study than a college. Most universities have a college of liberal arts and at least one program of graduate studies and/or professional schools (such as post-bachelor degree programs in the United States). Because of the lack of U.S. national standardization of education, exceptions may exist for any definition of what differentiates a college from a university.

**USCIS** U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: A U.S. government agency responsible for the administration of immigration and naturalization adjudication functions and establishing immigration services, policies, and priorities.