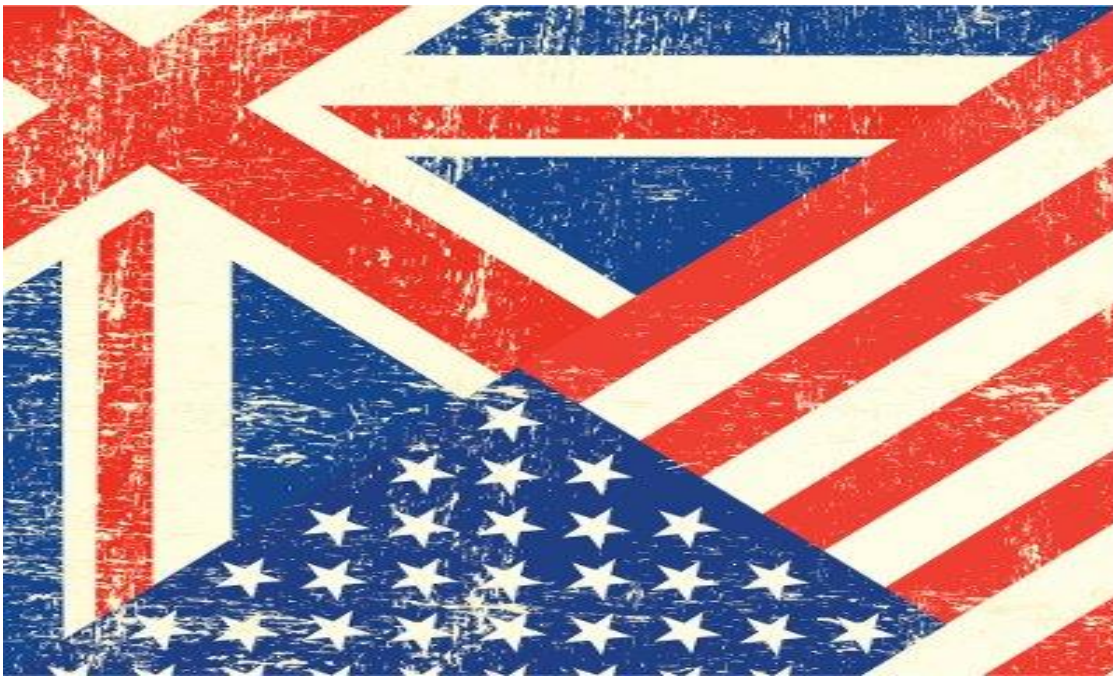


## UK vs. USA University Education System



According to the world university rankings compiled by the Times Higher Education, more than half of the world's top 200 universities are located in either the US or the UK. Both countries share a rich tradition of quality higher education, excellent research facilities, and a culture that promotes intellectualism as well as academic freedom. However, while both certainly provide an excellent environment for learning, there are many differences between the two countries regarding the structure of the university as well as student life. In this article, we will explore the primary differences between the American and British systems of education.

### Length of Time

Perhaps the most important difference between the education system [in the US](#), and [the UK](#), is the amount of time it takes to finish your degree (except in Scotland, where a bachelor's degree also lasts four years). In general, degree programs in the US take about one year longer than programs in the UK, although this varies depending upon whether you receive a Master's degree prior to a PhD. In both systems, you can go directly to a PhD program out of your undergraduate program, but in the UK it is more common to complete a Master's degree program before moving on to a PhD. Courses of study are shorter in the UK because the course programs are generally much more focused than in the US.

## Academic Term

Most universities in the US begin their terms in mid to late August, although smaller liberal arts colleges may start later. Most take a rather lengthy break beginning in mid-December and begin the second semester in early to mid-January. However, universities that are on different calendars, such as a trimester or quarter-based system, may begin their winter break at the Thanksgiving holiday, which falls at the end of November. The academic term in the UK is a bit more varied. While most also use the semester system, the trimester and quarter systems are used in some universities. Many schools start in September or October and end in May or June, making for a slightly longer academic year. However, the academic term is less standardized throughout the United Kingdom; if you choose to study there, your university might use a much different calendar.

## University Organization

Many universities in the UK are made up of “colleges” which are dedicated to a specific subject matter. While the colleges are still governed by the university, each college has quite a lot of autonomy from each other as well as the university itself. You live with others in your college, eat with others from your college, and generally stay within your college for the duration of your studies. Rather than applying to the central university admissions department, like you do in the US, you either apply directly to the college of the subject you want to study, or in the case of undergraduate programs, you apply through a centralized system which allows you to apply to several colleges at once. This system is called the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, or UCAS. This means that you have to know what you want to study before you even apply.

By contrast, in the US, you apply to the larger university and for the first year or more, you take courses from a variety of fields and only declare a major at the end of the first year or perhaps even during the second year. American universities have different “schools,” or departments, such as the School of Arts and Sciences, which houses a number of related majors. However, even after you declare a major at an American university, you are still expected to take classes outside of that field, known as “electives.” For this reason, we can say that the general emphasis of higher education in the US is breadth, or getting a range of knowledge from a variety of different subjects. In the UK, the emphasis is more on depth; getting a very thorough understanding of your chosen subject.

## Homework and Grades

Because the US system emphasizes breadth, courses require weekly or even biweekly readings as well as other assignments such as small writing projects, major research papers, and oral presentations throughout the course. In the UK, most schools are much more lecture-based, with only occasional assignments throughout the semester. In some cases, there may be no actual required assignments and instead your entire grade may be based on one final exam. In the US, your grade will be based on

your performance on the variety of assignments, with a final exam making up only a percentage of your total grade.

## Cost

The cost of education in both countries is far from cheap, but the cost of an education in the United States is generally higher. According to a law passed in 2012, universities in England may charge up to £9000 (approximately \$14,300) per year. Of course, this applies only to citizens of the UK and the EU, not international students. Fees for international students can be significantly higher. The government sets the limits for tuition fees, and each individual school sets its own fee up to that limit.

By contrast, the government has very little control over what universities charge in the United States. The US differentiates between in-state tuition fees and out-of-state tuition fees, as well as between private and public universities. These distinctions determine the tuition fee. The average tuition fee for public two-year institutions is around \$3000 per year, while the average fee for private four-year institutions is around \$29,000 per year. Finally, some private four-year institutions can cost up to \$50,000 per year. In order to help students cover the cost of tuition in both countries, loans are available through the government with favorable terms and interest rates. Visit our [Financial Aid Center](#) for more information about financing your education in the US, and our [Financial Aid for the UK](#) section to learn more about funding an education in the UK.

## Accommodation

Both countries provide students with residence halls in which to live. They are roughly equivalent, although [in the UK](#) it is more normal to have a bedroom by yourself, whereas [in the US](#), you may very well share a bedroom with at least one other person. However, after the first year, students in the US may have additional housing options available to them, such as private housing or off-campus housing. It is also more common for dormitories to be self-catered in the UK, while the US normally provides a range of full dining options for its students. One potentially significant difference is that maid service is common in the residence halls in the UK, although students pay a nominal fee for this service.

## Conclusion

While both countries provide a great education, each system approaches education slightly differently, and there are advantages and disadvantages to each. If you are considering getting your education in either the US or the UK, you should take into consideration the various differences mentioned in this article, especially the amount of time it takes to finish the degree, the tuition fees and whether you prefer more depth or more breadth in your degree program.

	America	Britain
<b>Length of Time</b>	BA: 4 years MA: 2 years PhD: 5-7 years or longer	BA: 3 years MA: 1 year PhD: 3 years
<b>Academic Term</b>	Most schools use the semester system, but some use a trimester or quarter system. Most schools start in mid to late August and end in May.	Most also use a semester system, but some use trimester or quarter systems. The start and end of an academic year varies by university.
<b>University Organization</b>	Universities are often divided into schools by subject, but these schools do not typically have a lot of autonomy from the university.	University acts an umbrella organization for the different colleges. Colleges are fairly independent of one another.
<b>Style of Education</b>	More varied, liberal arts, study outside your major.	Take only classes in your college.
<b>Depth vs Breadth</b>	Breadth	Depth
<b>Homework</b>	Constant reading and writing assignments	General assignments or no assignments throughout the semester
<b>Cost</b>	High	Moderate
<b>Grades</b>	Based on overall performance on all assignments	Based mostly on the final exam
<b>Athletics</b>	Important social activity; athletic scholarships available.	Intramural sports; generally no athletic scholarships available.
<b>Living Situation</b>	Dormitories with roommate. Off-campus housing occasionally available.	Dormitories without roommate generally. Off-campus housing generally available.
<b>Types of Degrees</b>	Associates, Bachelors, Masters, PhD, variety of vocational and professional degrees.	Higher National Diploma, Certificate of Higher Education, Diploma of Higher Education, Foundation Degree, Bachelors, Masters, PhD, variety of professional and vocational degrees. Postgraduate degrees divided into taught and research degrees.

Source: <https://www.internationalstudent.com/study-abroad/guide/uk-usa-education-system/>