

# SUMMER SCHOOL

**Is it for me?**

A Brief Guide  
to a US Summer School Experience



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# SUMMER SCHOOL

## Is it for me?

Welcome to the Fulbright Greece U.S. Summer School Guide!

This guide was designed to help students and their parents on how to select the “right” summer school in the U.S. and was put together to provide answers to frequently asked questions such as:

Should I attend a summer school?

How do I select what is best for me?

What criteria should I have in mind when I do my research?

The guide contains a timeline on researching and applying to U.S. summer schools and brief interviews with high school students who attended U.S. Summer schools.

What makes this brief guide unique is that it was prepared by a high school student under the guidance of the Fulbright Foundation. We wish to acknowledge the work of Eleni Samara, a graduating senior from Athens College, who spearheaded this project during her 2010 summer internship at the Fulbright Foundation.

We hope that you enjoy reading our U.S. Summer School Guide and that you will find it to be a helpful resource in your search for the “right” program.

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## What is a summer school?

The term summer school usually refers to a period of study during the summer that is shorter in length than a normal semester. There are summer programs in most areas of study, from academic subjects (the arts, humanities and sciences) to skills such as playing an instrument or a sport. Personal development and leadership skills are also major themes. Though usually sponsored by a public or private school, college or university, summer school programs often involve a lot more hands-on learning than is offered in regular classes. Many summer school programs include sports, travel and social activities in their curricula, allowing students to pursue their interests or explore new ones in anticipation of applying to college. They also offer opportunities to work on personal development and leadership skills.

## Why should I attend a US summer school?

Most students who attend a summer school wish to prepare themselves prior to undertaking their full-time studies in the United States or elsewhere. The summer school system gives them a taste of college life and the chance to pursue their interests. Academic credit is given to students who take rigorous courses during summer programs; such credit may count for both high-school classes and future college course selection. The experience of summer school may be credited in college applications, and students have the option of asking their summer school professors for recommendation letters. There are students who attend summer schools in order to attain a certain level of specialized or even professional training in a specific field of study (ranging from painting and photography, creative or non-fiction writing to biomedical engineering and nanotechnology), while others simply wish to travel abroad to enjoy tourist attractions and experience another culture through education. However, for most students, the main reason for enrolling in summer school is to meet new people, experience another way of thinking and challenge oneself.

A challenging summer school program can increase your chances of getting into a competitive college.

# When do I do what?

## Fall

**September:** This is the time to begin looking for a school. Take your time and strive to cover all aspects.

**October:** Now that you have done your research, you should make a list of your 5 favorite schools and programs.

**November:** Meet with your college counselor or whoever is helping you with your enrollment, and discuss all options.

## Winter

**December:** It would be wise to contact the school and ask for information, admission deadlines, etc. If the deadlines are approaching, you should begin filling out your applications by the end of the month.

**January:** Most schools update their websites during this time of year, so check daily for new information. You should apply by the end of the month/beginning of February. (Note: some schools begin their admissions process later on, so be sure to have the correct information.)

**February:** Once you have applied and checked that the school has received your application, you can relax. Wait a few weeks, and then contact the admissions office about any new information.

## Spring

**April-May:** Around this time of year you will receive your admissions letter. If you have applied to more than one school, you should now decide where you want to go and withdraw enrollment from the rest.

## Summer

**June:** Prepare yourself for summer school. Review all information sent to you. Summer school begins.

**August:** Back home. Save all work done during summer school and stay in touch with professors, faculty and friends.

# What criteria should I have in mind when looking for a summer school?

The following list presents the basic and most common criteria students have in mind when researching different schools:

## **Purpose**

What is it that you wish to accomplish during the program? What are your personal and professional aspirations?

## **Personal preferences regarding:**

- i. The size of the school
- ii. The location of the school
- iii. Recreational activities, visits, free time
- iv. Cost and housing
- v. Student population
- vi. Coed or not
- vii. Curriculum

## **Duration of course**

## **Faculty and professors**

## **Philosophy and reputation of the school**

## **Tuition and fees -Financial aid packages**

# How do I choose the best summer school for myself?

After you are done with your research, it is time to decide which school is the best fit for you. Your main focus when doing this should be the criteria listed above. If you are able to visit the schools that interest you, then try to grasp each school's distinctive ambience. In any case, you should try to imagine yourself in the environment each school offers and picture yourself as a student there. If you feel comfortable and at home when imagining this, then your choice has been made.

Of course, this is not always as easy as it may sound, so try getting second opinions from friends and family or even students who attended the school in previous years. This will provide you with a well-rounded and perhaps more objective view of each of your choices.

## How do I choose my courses?

For a complete summer school experience, the courses that you choose should not only interest you, but also aim at fulfilling your goals. For this reason, it is imperative that you determine whether there are any courses you need or should take, and prioritize accordingly. You can also inquire as to the most popular professors and classes. Do these appeal to you? If not, then follow your instincts. Especially if the school provides a “course shopping period,” do take full advantage of it to try out all the courses that seem interesting before making your final choices. Be sure to experiment! Try to find classes that will appeal to your personality and at the same time challenge you intellectually. You can also ask for additional advice from people who know you well (family, friends and/or school counselors), and of course advice is always available at the school’s admissions office.

## Insider advice, tips and suggestions

Research is crucial to your making a decision. Try to thoroughly study all candidate schools, their curricula and policies before choosing. It is also advisable to contact each admissions office.

Discuss each choice with someone you trust and know will advise you wisely.

While you should ask for other people’s opinions, it’s you that has the final say.

Keep in mind that just because a school is popular, that doesn’t mean that it is the right one for you. Small or lesser known schools may provide an education of equal or even better quality than well known ones.

Start your enrollment process as early as possible. This way you can be mentally and academically prepared. Have all forms and requirements ready by the end of January or February.

Have an open mind and a positive attitude. Be motivated and strive to enjoy this unique experience.

Summer school courses range from painting and photography, creative or non-fiction writing to biomedical engineering and nanotechnology.

# What if summer school doesn't appeal to me?

Even if summer school doesn't appeal to you, there are other ways to broaden your horizons, build up your resume and enhance your chances for admission to a US College.

**Distance Learning:** If you would like to keep up with school work and/or learn something new, distance learning provides you with the opportunity to stay at home, yet still be academically active during summer vacation. Several schools and colleges offer courses that provide you with interesting topics and assignments. The most common technologies used in distance education are videotape, broadcast television, interactive video, audio conferencing, CD-ROM and, primarily, Web-based courses.

**Summer Job:** By getting a job during your summer break, you will not only earn money, but will also acquire memorable experiences. A summer job is a way of gaining meaningful job experience that will help you in choosing your career or getting a job later on. Try to find a job within your field of interest and in an environment that you enjoy.

**Summer Internship:** If you want to intern during the summer months, your preparation should begin by the fall of the previous school year. Find out what types of internships exist in your area and apply to the ones you find more interesting. Although few internships are paid, you should be aware that they constitute significant work experience. Recommendation letters can also be acquired for future use.

**Civic engagement:** Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism and organizational involvement to electoral participation. Volunteers/participants usually address an issue, work within the community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy.

If you wish to be actively engaged in a specific project during the summer months, the opportunities are countless. Pick an issue or problem of public concern that greatly interests you, and then find organizations that are involved in its solution. While many will accept any volunteer, others will follow a certain admissions process. This is a great opportunity for you to voice your concerns and be an active participant in the community, while at the same time gaining valuable experience.

## Useful Links for Locating Summer Programs

[www.nelnetsolutions.com/summerop/code/ssector.asp](http://www.nelnetsolutions.com/summerop/code/ssector.asp)

[www.theeducationalregister.com](http://www.theeducationalregister.com)

[www.boardingschools.com](http://www.boardingschools.com)

[www.studyusa.com](http://www.studyusa.com)

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# Student interviews on their U.S. Summer School experience

## **How did you find the summer program you attended?**

- student a** *A year ago, I decided to attend a summer program. During my research, I stumbled across a collaborative program between MIT and Harvard University, which focused on physics experiments. After thoroughly researching the program and discussing its potential with my college counsellor, I applied and, luckily, got accepted.*
- student b** *I found this program through our school's counselor.*
- student c** *I found out about the program through friends and got additional counseling and advice from the Psychico College Admissions Office.*

## **What did the admissions process entail?**

- student a** *I began my research at the end of January and found the physics program in mid-February. By the end of the month I had applied. Undoubtedly, the most difficult assignment to complete was to explain why I wanted to go to MIT that summer, in two lines! Unlike other summer programs, this was a competitive one, which meant that the seats were limited; I think that the two-line explanation was the admissions office's way of assessing how eager and interested each student was.*
- student b** *We had to prepare our paperwork, such as our personal statement and our résumé, and we also needed to fill in the summer program application in order to get accepted. After we received the acceptance letter or e-mail, we needed to fill in the acceptance package in order to finalize our decision and be able to attend the summer program.*
- student c** *The application was online; naturally, this simplified the entire process. There were a plethora of documents to complete, concerning personal information and preferences.*

## **Why did you choose this summer program?**

- student a** *The year I applied I was a rising junior – still a sophomore. During my research, I discovered that most summer programs addressed juniors. However, MIT's program also accepted a select number of rising juniors/sophomores. Other than that, the program's curriculum seemed very interesting, especially since I have decided that I will study engineering.*
- student b** *I chose this program because I'm interested in science and I was searching for a summer experience that I could benefit from. Smith College has an amazing reputation and offers very interesting courses in science which are taught by experienced professors. I was also attracted by pictures of its campus and laboratories. My goal was to gain new knowledge on the subjects I'm interested in and broaden my horizons by meeting new people.*
- student c** *When researching summer programs, I already knew that I want to study something related to economics. When I studied the Brown curriculum, I realized that Brown's course was perfect for me and my interests, and would definitely provide me with a basis for college.*

**How was the program structured?**

- student a** *The program's main focus was the experimental aspect of physics, in other words, physics in action. Our day would be split in two: in the morning we studied the theory of light and then went on with our experiments, and then in the afternoon we would follow the same pattern, this time focusing on energy. The program lasted two weeks.*
- student b** *We would wake up around 7:45 every day, eat breakfast and get ready for class. At 9:00 classes started and lasted until 12:00 and after that we had an hour for lunch until classes started again till 16:00. In the afternoon (16:00 - 22:00) we could either go to Northampton (15-minute walk) or to the gym, or spend time watching movies and doing creative work such as knitting, painting, pillow or jewelry making, etc., which were optional activities. Sometimes we had mandatory activities on schedule, such as going to the movies or to the theater. Other mandatory activities were floor meetings, field day, tie-dye, a lecture by a female astronaut and many more. Lights out was at 23:00.*
- student c** *Classes began at 9am and ended at 12 noon. We then had free time to do anything we wished, i.e. hang out with friends, do sports or attend several seminars that the college organized concerning college and/or academic life.*

**Do you have any tips or advice to share?**

- student a** *My greatest advice would be to respect the deadlines each school posts, and, when essays are required, the word limit too. I would also advise students to start their research early so as to ensure their admission. As for the time that you will spend in the United States, be open to new experiences. Being sociable and open-minded is the best way to ensure that you have a great time. In the classroom, don't be shy, ask many questions and try to get as much as you can out of this unique experience.*
- student b** *I didn't face any difficulties, neither while preparing for my trip to the States nor while I was there, because everything is very organized and under control so there is nothing to worry about. My only advice is to have all your paperwork (passport, ID, health insurance card, acceptance letter) organized because you'll probably need it, especially at the airport.*
- student c** *I would advise anyone that wants to go to a summer school to focus on the paperwork that is needed for enrollment, and start early in the year. Otherwise, you risk being swamped by paperwork (visa, application essays, etc.). Also, if the school requires an essay, be sure that the essay is representative of yourself and your interests.*

**What alternatives would you propose to someone who doesn't want to attend a summer school?**

- student a** *It is crucial that you do something during your summer months, an activity that will benefit you in one way or another. This year I was an intern for a manufacturing company in Greece. It was a unique experience, because I was given the opportunity to see the life of a civil engineer up close, with all the problems that he has to overcome. On the other hand, I know several students that attended university programs that specialized in their hobbies: art, cinema, photography. The best thing a student can do is to find an activity that interests him/her, be it a summer course, a summer job or his/her favourite hobby.*

- student b** *If one cannot attend a summer program in the States, there are many opportunities in one's hometown. Volunteer work and internships are always available for anyone who's willing to dedicate his or her free time to search for such an activity.*
- student c** *If summer school isn't for you, I think it would be a wise decision to work or intern somewhere. This activity will not include academic responsibilities but will provide you with work experience and will boost your resume.*

The Fulbright Foundation would like to acknowledge Ms. Louiza Bartzokas, Ms. Vasso Papadopoulou and Mr. Dimitris Flouris for their contributions to the Summer School Guide.

Small or lesser known schools may provide an education of equal or even better quality than well-known ones.



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