



FONDATION  
ZDENEK ET MICHAELA  
BAKALA

**GUIDE  
FOR STUDIES  
IN SELECTIVE  
UNIVERSITIES IN THE UNITED STATES  
OR THE UNITED KINGDOM**

Zdenek and Michaela Bakala  
Foundation, Geneva  
March 2014



AT THE END OF 2012, THE ZDENEK AND MICHAELA BAKALA FOUNDATION LAUNCHED ITS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS RESIDING IN SWITZERLAND TO PURSUE MASTER'S OR PHD-LEVEL STUDIES AT SELECTIVE AND PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITIES, MAINLY IN THE UNITED STATES AND THE UNITED KINGDOM.

DURING ITS FIRST CANDIDATE SELECTION IN 2013, THE FOUNDATION GRANTED SCHOLARSHIPS TO SIX STUDENTS FROM THE FRENCH-SPEAKING PART OF SWITZERLAND TO STUDY AT HARVARD LAW SCHOOL, HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, YALE UNIVERSITY, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY AND THE BOSTON SCHOOL OF LAW.

THESE STUDENTS HAD TO DEMONSTRATE MOTIVATION, PERSEVERANCE AND COURAGE IN ORDER TO APPLY AND THEN BE ADMITTED TO THESE INSTITUTIONS.

TO FURTHER INSPIRE OTHER STUDENTS TO TAKE UP A SIMILAR CHALLENGE AND TO INFORM THEM ABOUT THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS TO CONSIDER IN DOING SO, THE FOUNDATION COMPILED THEIR EXPERIENCES AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS GUIDE.

THE CONTENT OF THIS GUIDE IS NOT COMPREHENSIVE, BUT SHOULD SERVE AS A FIRST SOURCE OF REFERENCE FOR FUTURE AMBITIOUS AND TALENTED CANDIDATES WISHING TO EXPAND THEIR HORIZONS BY SEEKING EXCELLENCE IN THEIR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL CAREERS.

IN VIEW OF THE LARGE SPECTRUM OF ACADEMIC FIELDS SUPPORTED BY THE FOUNDATION, THIS GUIDE FOCUSES ON GENERAL ASPECTS ONLY.

## TAKING THE PLUNGE AND NOT CONFORMING

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Most of our candidates told us that they had, at one time or another, encountered someone who inspired them and motivated them to believe in their strengths and to dare to set higher ambitions: a professor, a colleague more advanced in his studies, a traineeship supervisor, a family member.

On their own, most of them would never have dreamed of aiming for excellence and might have been satisfied to stay in their intellectual and personal comfort zone and the relatively comfortable conditions of student life in Switzerland compared to other places in the world.

Fierce competition, onerous administrative procedures, daunting application deadlines, costs: these are obstacles which at first appear impossible to overcome, and everyone around you will constantly remind you of them.

Not becoming discouraged, believing in your strengths and your desire to do more and to do things differently, accepting that any experience will be useful, in one way or another, in brief, being a non-conformist: this attitude is shared by all our scholarship recipients.

**REMEMBER:** quickly get in contact with students or people who share your ambition to achieve excellence – apply for grants or awards – look for information on US or UK universities on the internet as soon as possible – obtain information from professors or assistants who studied at these universities – contact students at your own university who have studied abroad, for example to get help when looking for housing.

## FIRST STEPS

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After your initial excitement, the race against the clock will begin to provide the targeted foreign universities with a huge volume of documents, often in very short periods of time.

## DEADLINES

Application deadlines differ from one university to the other (autumn or spring in general). You should start your application process at least a year to a year and a half in advance of beginning your studies at the foreign university.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Here are some of the documents you will have to provide:

- your academic results and reports on your extra-curricular activities (in English, sometimes even duly certified)
- scores of your English tests (TOEFL, IELTS, etc.)
- scores of your standardized tests such as the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) or the GMAT (Graduate Management Admissions Test)
- letters of recommendation from one or two professors
- your motivation letter
- a budget of your expenses
- information on your sources of funds during your stay abroad

## ACADEMIC RESULTS AND REPORTS ON YOUR EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

If you start your studies in Switzerland with the idea of applying later to highly selective universities in the United States or the United Kingdom, you should seek excellence in your academic results (usually a minimum average of 5 out of 6 or higher). This will maximize your chances.

The approach in the US in particular favors students with multiple talents and interests. If you have not mastered a sport or musical instrument or any other particular interest, think about getting involved in activities as soon as you start your university studies. It may be helpful to gain practical experience and get to know certain professors by being an assistant to one of them.

## TOEFL AND OTHER ENGLISH TESTS

Most US and UK universities require proof of English proficiency from students who are non-native English speakers.

You will have to take the TOEFL (“Test of English as a Foreign Language”), on paper or online. Required scores vary from one university to the other. Tests are given on certain fixed dates. You should know them in advance to be sure you obtain your results on time.

**REMEMBER:** look for information on the TOEFL ([www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)) or on the IELTS ([www.ielts.org](http://www.ielts.org)).

## STANDARDIZED TESTS (GRE, GMAT)

Admission to certain graduate programs in the US will require you to pass standardized tests like the GRE (Graduate Record Examination) or the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test).

These tests measure your verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, analytical writing and critical thinking and are the most widely recognized of their kind in the world. A few centers in Switzerland offer these tests on certain fixed dates.

**REMEMBER:** look for information about the GRE, the GMAT or any other standardized test required ([www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)) ([www.mba.com/global](http://www.mba.com/global)).

## LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

You will also have to provide one or two letters of recommendation from professors who are in a position to ascertain your academic results, your motivation, and whether your selected university is appropriate for your course of study or research plan.

The teaching style at Swiss universities, often lectures in large lecture halls during the first years of studies, does not encourage personal contact between professors and students. In addition, in contrast to other countries, professors in Switzerland are rarely asked to write letters of recommendation. If you get to know your professors as early as possible, it may help you later on when you ask them to write you a letter of recommendation.

Often this letter will be sent directly by your professor to the university and you will not be aware of its content.

**REMEMBER:** quickly and efficiently get to know your professors – look for professors with experience at a selective US or UK university – if your academic field allows you to do so, work for these professors.

## MOTIVATION LETTER

Your motivation letter will contain the reasons why you wish to study at your selected university. In particular for the US, it should contain personal aspects, illustrated by concrete examples. You may use sample letters, accessible from the web, or obtain information from colleagues who have experience in drafting them.

**REMEMBER:** pay attention when drafting your motivation letter and be sure to find out early about your selected university's requirements in this regard.

## BUDGET

In order to assess your financial needs during your stay, you will need to prepare a budget.

Most US or UK universities provide budgets on their web sites for tuition fees and living expenses in those countries. Be advised that these are only estimates and that actual costs may be higher.

**REMEMBER:** talk with students who have lived in the US or the UK to get an idea of the real current costs and the various line items to provide for in your budget.

## SOURCES OF FUNDS

Early in the application process to the US or UK university, you will have to indicate whether you have sufficient financial means to cover the costs of your stay. You will increase your chances of being admitted if you meet this condition.

So, the question is: should you apply to these very expensive universities if you cannot afford them?

The answer is YES, for various reasons. First, a candidate's motivation and excellence are the most important criteria for the majority of universities in the US and the UK. Second, although financing is difficult to obtain, various funding sources exist, granted by the US or UK universities themselves, by governments, or by institutions or foundations such as the Zdenek and Michaela Bakala Foundation. Let your excellence and motivation drive you,

and don't let your lack of financial means slow you down.

If you talk with older students who have studied in such prestigious US or UK universities, you will realize that most of them received scholarships.

Knowing full well that this obstacle is one of the most difficult to overcome, our Foundation's aim is to help you with precisely this aspect. By applying early enough for our scholarships, you will increase your chances of being admitted at your chosen university.

**REMEMBER:** look for several different sources of financing – apply to your foreign university and for scholarships simultaneously.

## RECOGNITION OF ACADEMIC RESULTS

Most Swiss universities have entered into bilateral or multilateral agreements with very good universities around the world that allow their students to study abroad under very favorable conditions, both in financial terms and from the perspective of the recognition of their academic results. Mobility departments of Swiss universities have longstanding experience with these exchange programs.

However, US and UK universities at the top of the international rankings do not need to participate in these bilateral or multilateral agreements. It is therefore more difficult to obtain recognition for your diploma and grades if you want to study abroad individually, outside of a university exchange program. Costs are higher in such cases since no reduction or exemption of tuition fees is granted.

Our Foundation's objective is to help you apply to these institutions from a financial point of view. However, you will have to clarify very early in the process whether and how your diploma and grades may be recognized in Switzerland upon your return. Swiss ENIC and the Information and Documentation Service of the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities ([www.crus.ch](http://www.crus.ch)) may help you.

# OTHER NECESSARY STEPS

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## HEALTH INSURANCE

Foreign universities require you to be insured against illness during your stay. Often you will have to purchase the foreign university's own health insurance. We recommend that you check the conditions of your own insurance coverage in advance of your stay abroad.

## STUDENT VISAS

A stay of more than 90 days for study in the US requires a visa. If your nationality is Swiss, you will have to go to the US Embassy in Bern after filling out the appropriate forms. You will have to provide proof of your financial means during your study abroad. The whole process may take 2 to 3 months (<http://bern.usembassy.gov>).

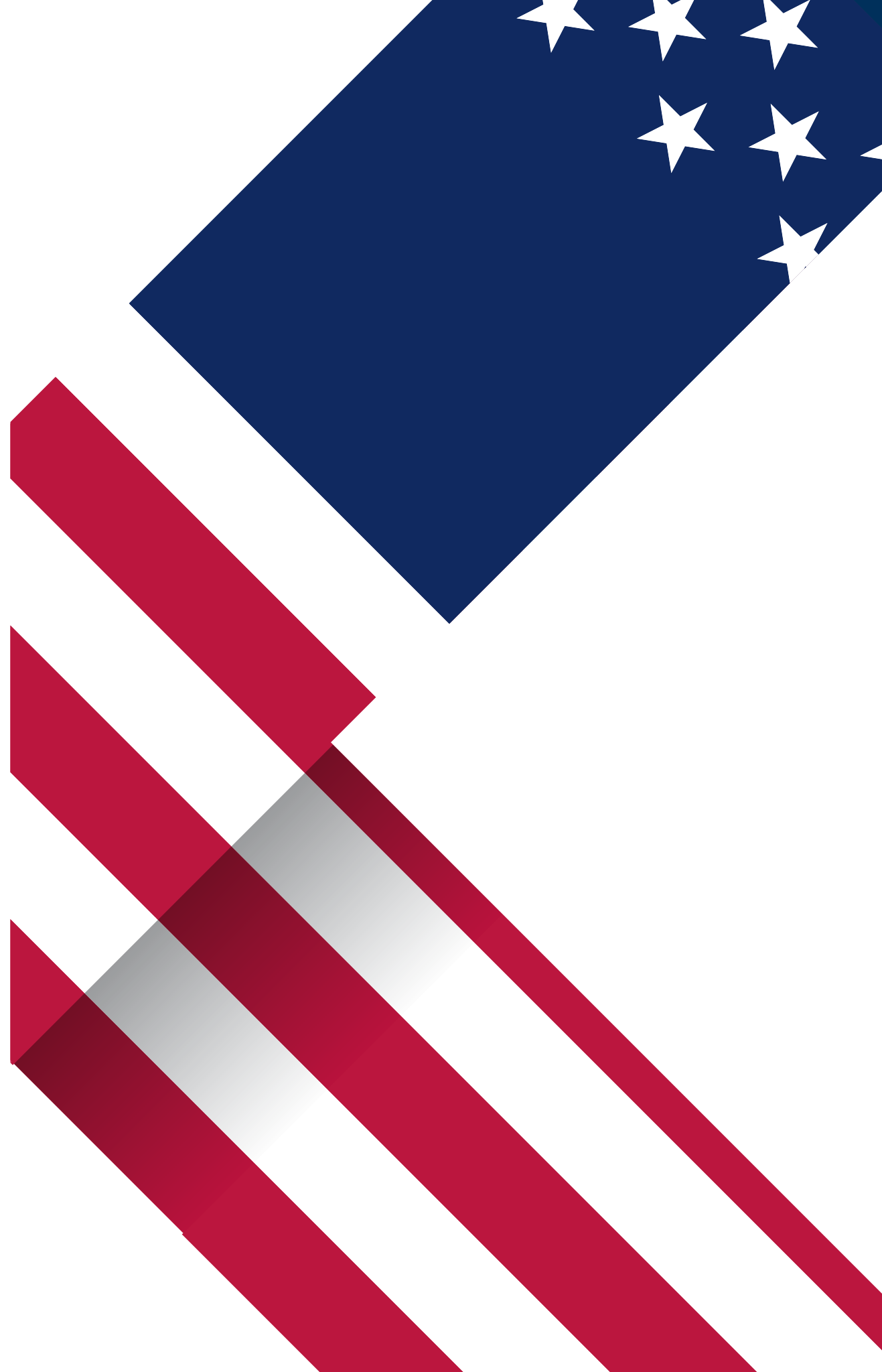
Students who hold a Swiss passport or the passport of a member country of the European Economic Area (EEA), including members of the European Union, do not need a visa to study in the United Kingdom ([www.gov.uk/government/world/switzerland](http://www.gov.uk/government/world/switzerland)).

Now that you are aware of the main requirements of universities in the US and the UK, you can start your application process by collecting the necessary documents as soon as possible.

The Zdenek and Michaela Bakala Foundation and its scholarship recipients will be happy to help you in the application process.

Patricia Legler, Foundation Manager

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