Embassy provides insight into U.S. universities

The U.S. Embassy in Luanda provides a wealth of information through its EducationUSA Advising Center to American citizens and others interested in pursuing higher education in the United States.

The center provides accurate, objective information and guidance to prospective students about accredited colleges and universities across the U.S. An adviser guides visitors through the processes of selecting institutions that suit their needs, applying for admission, seeking financial aid, and preparing for departure to the United States.

The resources are available to both U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents. All American citizens – even those who have never lived in the United States and those who have have dual citizenship with other countries – have the same privileges as other citizens when it comes to opportunities for higher education, according to the U.S. Embassy Education Advisor, Sadraque Vicente.

Importantly, admission officials at most U.S. universities value prospective students who have lived abroad because those students bring diverse experiences and perspectives to university communities, he said.

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Education: 5 pro tips for prospective students

“For admissions purposes, you usually are evaluated as international students, because admissions officers are assigned by geographical areas and have knowledge of the schools their applicants have attended,” Vicente said.

Similarly, U.S. students who live overseas are eligible for the same financial aid packages as other U.S. students, but there are five important considerations to keep in mind, he said.

1 U.S. citizens living overseas are entitled to fill out a form called the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, to apply for grants, work-study programs, and loans. Those students should state clearly and repeatedly that they are U.S. citizens living abroad. The form is widely known as the FAFSA.

2 Generally, U.S. students living overseas cannot claim legal residence in any particular state, unless their parents have a residence and pay taxes in a particular state. As a result, U.S. citizens living overseas typically cannot apply for in-state tuition rates, even in states where they were born and lived several years when they were young.

3 The Free Application for Federal Student Aid application requires income tax information from students’ parents, if the students’ parents are U.S. citizens or U.S. green card holders, even if the parents live outside of the United States.

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If the students’ parents are not U.S. citizens or U.S. green card holders, they might not file U.S. tax returns, which makes it difficult to use the FAFSA. The form will require additional information from students in that group.

Students should print and keep a copy of their completed Free Application for Federal Student Aid applications, and wait until they receive an analysis back from the federal student aid board. They should send copies of the applications to the admissions and financial aid offices of the schools they are applying to, along with cover letters explaining the family’s financial circumstances, so that school administrators can do their own analysis if they need to.

Vicente said U.S. students living abroad can apply to their dream schools where they may well face less competition for admission and financial aid than their counterparts who live in the United States.

Edymilson Semedo, 17, was born in Boston, but has lived in Angola since he was 3. He’s interested in returning to the United States for college and he contacted the EducationUSA Advising Center to learn the process.

“I appreciated the information I learned, and I am now preparing myself to apply for scholarships in the U.S. I am also working hard to enhance my English language skills,” he said.

Some universities bend over backwards for U.S. citizens abroad, because it is a good way for the schools to attract a diverse international population, Vicente said. However, prospective students must manage their application process carefully and be realistic about which universities to apply to, he said. Some students may need to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language.

For more information about the EducationUSA Advising Center, visit www.educationusa.state.gov or send an email to PASInboxLuanda@state.gov.
Consular contact information
Our American Citizen Services hours are from 2 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., Mondays through Thursdays, excluding holidays. For notaries and non-emergency passport services, make appointments via https://ao.usembassy.gov/. Here are other ways to reach us:
ConsularLuanda@state.gov
https://ao.usembassy.gov/
www.Facebook.com/USinLuanda
(244) 222-641-000, business hours
(244) 923-404-209, emergency after-hours

Embassy wants to reach Americans during crises
The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) allows Americans to register with the U.S. Embassy when they travel overseas. The program provides embassy officers the means to reach Americans during emergencies abroad and in times of need for their families back home.

Americans should keep their contact information updated, since it may be the only way for them to be contacted during critical times. Travelers can enroll in the program and edit their information at https://step.state.gov/step/ or at the U.S. Embassy.

Embassy closure dates ahead
The U.S. Embassy closes for official U.S. and Angolan holidays. Here are the closure dates through April:
Dec. 25: Christmas Day
Jan. 1: New Year’s Day
Jan. 21: Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Feb. 4: Initiation of Armed Struggle
Feb. 18: Presidents Day
March 5: Carnival
March 8: International Women’s Day.
April 4: Peace Day
April 19: Good Friday

Seeking suggestions for the newsletter’s future editions
The AmCit newsletter is designed for American citizens who live and work in Angola. This edition’s college education theme was suggested by a reader.

What topics would you like to know more about in future issues? How can we make this forum as useful as possible?

Email your ideas, questions, and suggestions to ACSLuanda@state.gov.