



A Quick Guide to Exploring Graduate School in the United States



Find a graduate program that is right for you

Your education is an important investment of your time and resources, so take charge of your path to make a choice that is the right fit for your professional goals, academic interests, and personal development.

Think about...

- Why do you want to go to graduate school?
- What do you want to learn? What are your passions? What makes you happy?
- What attributes or benefits of a graduate education are most important to you?
- Imagine yourself in graduate school on a day to day basis. What does that image look like in your mind?

Do your research. Take the initiative to go online, find resources, speak to friends and colleagues to learn as much about the different graduate programs and universities.

Think long term. Graduate school may only last a few years, but the international university alumni network that you will become a part of is a significant resource that you will have for a lifetime. What kind of network do you want?

Prepare for the application process

The best qualities in an engineering application are 1) a solid quantitative foundation; 2) an engaged and curious individual. Plan ahead with a list of your top choices schools, review and understand the application requirements, and map out the application deadlines.

TIPS for exams:

- Schedule early test dates for GRE, TOEFL or other required exams. It can take several weeks for these scores to be reported to each university, and the delay may affect your application.
- Don't stress about getting perfect scores. Applications are evaluated as a whole portfolio and not on a single criterion. There is no minimum GRE score that is required. Average scores can be found in some university publications and media such as U.S. News & World Report and Peterson's. There is a minimum TOEFL score of 100 to demonstrate English Language proficiency.

TIPS for letters of recommendations:

- A good reference is someone who knows you well or has worked with you closely.
- It will be helpful if they can include specific details and examples about your individual interests, talents, and experience in working with you.
- Speak with your references to request your letters of reference at least 4 weeks before the deadline



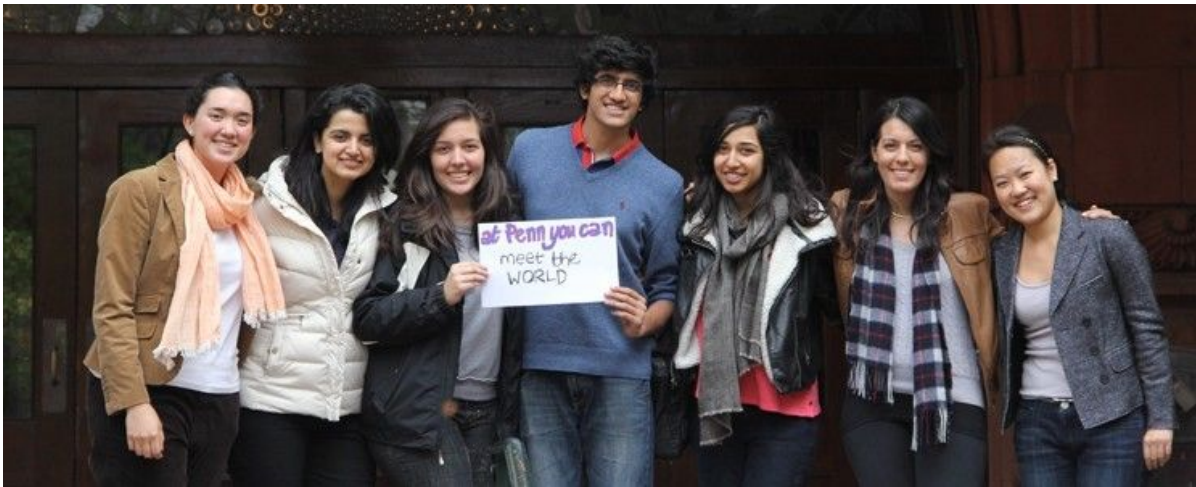
Student Profile
Jing Fang
SYSTEMS ENGINEERING MSE
2014

Penn Engineering has such a prestigious reputation. The school will provide me with all the resources I need. I have always wanted to come to Penn since I was a child. Coming to Penn is like dream come true. It is very convenient to travel in Philadelphia because everything is in walking distance and the transportation can take me to anywhere. It's also very close to New York City but it is also not too crowded. The school provides you with diverse courses options. I can develop my own interest and I can always find a class that fits my interest. And because of the resources from the Wharton School, I can gain business knowledge as well. The strong alumni network makes me feel like in a big family. People help each other and learn from each other.

TIPS for your personal statement:

We want to learn more about your individual interests, experiences, and factors that motivate you to pursue your field of engineering. Be specific if possible. These are a few examples of good writing points:

- Why do you want to pursue an engineering education?
- What first sparked your interest in engineering?
- What is your dream job and why?
- Are there any interesting engineering problems that you would like to solve one day?
- What do you hope to gain from this particular school/program?
- Are there any specific professors that you would like to learn from? Why?
- What motivates you?
- What do you do for fun?



Beginning a new program and the transition to the US:

Begin to build your new network. As soon as you're accepted into a new graduate program, we encourage you to seek out the local alumni chapters. Attend events and introduce yourself as a new student. Alumni are happy to welcome new members of their university community, and share information about their experience at Penn, campus life, and advice about starting your new experience.

Penn's alumni presence in Greater China is 15,000-strong, with both University-wide and school-specific alumni clubs established in cities throughout East Asia. Many Penn find the alumni clubs to be a great way to connect with Penn in their local communities.



Beijing Alumni Club

Loretta Evans, GEx'95

[Beijing Alumni Club Website](http://www.pennclubbeijing.com)
president@pennclubbeijing.com

Guangzhou Alumni Club

Gene Kim, W'92

gene@pennclubgz.com

Penn Club of Shanghai

Eric Tsaur, W'10

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Joseph Chan, C'91, W'91

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Penn Club of Shenzhen

Yishuo Hu, D'07

huyishuo@hotmail.com

<http://pennclubshenzhen.smugmug.com/>

Alumni Clubs in Taipei

<http://www.alumni.upenn.edu/club/taiwan.shtml>

Alumni Clubs in Hong Kong

<http://pennhk.com/>

Alumni Club in Singapore

<http://www.alumni.upenn.edu/club/singapore.shtml>



Penn Wharton Center

<https://pwcc.upenn.edu/>



Life in the United States

It is a challenging, stimulating, and sometimes difficult process to leave home and live in a different country and culture. Every culture has different rules about appropriate behavior, social norms, and expectations. It is easy to feel overwhelmed. Let the International Services office at your new school you through this process.

Everyone Experiences the "Adjustment Cycle"

Keep in mind that new international students and scholars often go through a series of reactions to their new environment. These reactions are referred to as the "adjustment cycle":

1. You start off feeling very excited about being in a new place and a new culture
2. You then find yourself getting homesick once the initial "high" has passed
3. This, too, will pass. As you make new friends, begin your classes and start exploring Philadelphia you will experience another upswing.

The adjustment cycle and its symptoms can be as short as a few days or can cover even years often depending on your length of stay and your strategies for coping. **No two "adjustment cycles" are alike.**

- Living abroad is an exciting and satisfying experience, but it also takes effort, patience, and perseverance on your part.
- Don't feel you are in any way "abnormal" if you experience highs and lows during your time here or if you find yourself longing for the familiarity of "home."
- These are all natural responses.
- If at any time you sense that you are stuck in a psychological low, whether for academic or personal adjustment reasons, do not hesitate to make use of the many resource services available on campus.
- You can speak with a counselor at the [Counseling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), an ISSS advisor, a residential advisor, a peer counselor, or your academic advisor. There is also a confidential helpline run by Penn student volunteers: [REACH-A-PEER](#) can be reached both online or by phone: 215.573.2727 from 9am -1am.
- Just make sure that you talk with someone about your feelings.

How Do You Adjust?

The following are some suggestions that other international students and scholars have found helpful:

- **Look and listen.** A word, phrase or gesture that means something in your home country may mean something very different in the US. Watch people's reactions in their conversations with you or with others:
 1. How close do people stand when they talk?
 2. How do people greet each other?
 3. Do people tend to agree with you or do they express dissenting opinions freely?
 4. What makes you feel dissatisfied or uncomfortable when communicating with someone?
 5. How do Americans change their communication styles when talking with a professor? a student? a friend? a family member? a stranger?
- **Ask questions.**
- **Try not to be judgmental.** It is important to avoid labeling everything in the US as good or bad in comparison with your own culture. Try to assess and understand others' opinions before making a judgment.
- **Show openness and curiosity.** To experience a new culture and to learn from it, it is important to be open to new experiences, try new things, and be curious about the way things are done.
- **Use your sense of humor.** It is likely that you will make mistakes as you explore a new culture. If you can laugh at your mistakes, learning will be easier.
- **Develop a support network.** One of the hardest things about being abroad is that you are separated from the network of support you have developed over many years. Such closeness cannot be instantly replaced. Nonetheless, you should make an effort to meet people so that new friendships can develop.
- **Get involved** with various programs and activities on and off campus. The more you put into an experience, the more you will learn from it.



Getting Involved

One way to make the most out of your time here and help you adjust to your new surroundings is to get involved. There is a wide array of clubs, programs, and organizations representing many interests. Please visit the [Student Programs](#) section of this site for International-related organizations and programs or the [Campus-wide Resources](#) for clubs, organizations or programs available throughout Penn.

Campus Life: Penn is a diverse community of scholars and students and there are many opportunities for you to meet people with similar academic, social or cultural interests. The [Office of Student Affairs](#) and the [Graduate Student Center](#) can help you connect with these groups.



Characteristics of Higher Education in the US and here at Penn

- Relationships between students and faculty tend to be more informal than in many other countries.
- In most classes, students are expected to ask questions or comment on the course material and readings.
- In assigning grades, professors may consider the student's contribution to class discussion during the semester.
- Almost all faculty members maintain regular office hours when students may come and talk about individual concerns such as: making sure you are meeting course requirements, if you are uncertain about an assignment or if you have questions about the course material.
- You will be assisted in many aspects of your education by your academic advisor. It is your responsibility to set up an appointment to meet with him or her.
- It is a good idea to meet with both the professor and your academic advisor at the first sign of difficulty with any class.
- Because international students must take a full course load every semester, early intervention with academic difficulties is important to help you fulfill your immigration requirements, as well as to be academically successful.

