

Expert View from USEIC: College vs. University



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Many students in Singapore are baffled by usage of the terms "college" and "university" in America. They assume that a college is similar to a junior college in Singapore, and when pursuing a bachelor's degree, they think only a university will provide them with the academic path they want.

In fact, the words "college" and "university" are often used interchangeably in the U.S. Both colleges and universities in America offer bachelor's degrees, which usually take four years to complete. The term "college" is often applied to a smaller institution, or part of a larger institution, which focuses on undergraduates, with few or no graduate (postgraduate) programs. A "university" is usually larger, with more graduate degrees available. But there are exceptions to every rule. For example, Dartmouth College retains its "college" designation, even though it has world-famous graduate schools of business and medicine. A college may also be the undergraduate school housed within a large university: Columbia College is the academic home of all undergraduates at Columbia University.

It is important to note the difference between a college and a community college. A community college, also called a two-year college, provides only the first two years of a bachelor's

degree. Students graduate with an associate's degree and then spend two more years in a four-year college or university to gain a bachelor's degree.

Should you consider attending a smaller college? Definitely. A small college can provide many advantages. If you are one of only 1,000 or 2,000 students, you will receive much more individualized attention than if you are one of 40,000. You will enjoy smaller class sizes – perhaps seminars of less than fifteen students, rather than large lecture halls of 200. You will get to know your professors on a personal basis. At small colleges, many professors are actively involved with the college community and may invite your class over for dinner. Although there may be fewer extracurricular offerings at a small college, your chances for participation and leadership roles will be much greater. For example, at a large university, you will have to try out and compete for a place in a drama production, a music ensemble, or a club sports team. But at a small college, if you turn up, you're in! Many students worry that only universities can provide research opportunities. But in fact, at a college where there are no graduate students, *all* the research positions go to undergraduates.

In summary, when choosing a university, don't overlook a wonderful option: a college

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