

“A Stanford Education”—A New Way of learning

Welcome to Stanford!

- As an international student, you’ve been going to school for many years and you’ve excelled—you have mastered the academic cultures you’ve experienced so far—and your success has brought you here.
- At Stanford, you are going to encounter a new academic culture, different from what you’ve experienced at other U.S. schools or in your home country.
- You will need to learn the ways of this new system if you want to be successful here.

Many international students have conquered Stanford academic culture and they all say the same things:

- “Slow down!” Take time to get to know the system and adapt to it—ask questions, get help and don’t assume the system is the same as your home country.
- “Be open to new ways of studying and working with professors and students.” Your familiar, comfortable ways of studying and interacting with students and professors may not be appropriate or successful here.

We are providing this overview of the Academic System at Stanford to help you as you begin your studies.

This will begin to give meaning to the phrase “a Stanford Education”.

The American University System

In the United States there is no central ministry of education that oversees higher education.

Universities in the U.S. have considerable autonomy in determining their academic procedures and policies.

Different universities will have different policies and procedures.

These differences shape the academic culture of the university and also shape your academic experience at the university.

Some examples of the ways that Stanford’s academic culture may differ from other U.S. universities and from universities in your home country:

- **teaching methods** (lecture, group work, seminar, asking questions in class)
- **grading philosophies and mechanisms** (the honor code, grading on a curve, GPA, a grade for class participation)
- **evaluation of course work** (% of your grade that comes from homework, research papers, lab reports or an exam)
- **length of the school terms and year** (the quarter system, “dead week”, graduation date/s)

Stanford’s Philosophy of Education---the Honor Code and the Fundamental Standard

To understand the academic culture of Stanford, you must understand the two guiding principles for all students and faculty:

THE HONOR CODE---governs how you complete academic work

- In 1921, the University adopted an honor code that applies to all students and faculty. The Honor Code states: “Absolute integrity is expected of every Stanford student in all undertakings.”
- The full text of the Honor Code can be found here: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>
- The Honor Code applies to all students.
- What this means for you:
 - Exams are not proctored, you have the responsibility to complete exams without collaborating or cheating.
 - You are expected to complete all course work and degree requirements as specified by the professor.
 - Violations of the Honor Code are treated seriously and can result in suspension.
 - [The Office of Judicial Affairs](#) handles all honor code violations.

[Test your understanding of plagiarism. Take our quick quiz now.](#)

THE FUNDAMENTAL STANDARD---governs your behavior as part of the Stanford community

Stanford established a standard for student behavior in 1896.

“Students at Stanford are expected to show both within and without the University such respect for order, morality, personal honor and the rights of others as is demanded of good citizens. Failure to do this will be sufficient cause for removal from the University.

- What this means for you:

- The Fundamental Standard applies to all students.
- Violations of the Fundamental Standard can result in suspension or expulsion from Stanford.
- [The Office of Judicial Affairs](#) handles all violations of the Fundamental Standard.
- Read some examples of violations of the Standard here:
<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/fundamental.htm>

Methods of the Stanford Academic System

COURSE TYPES

Course structure at Stanford varies depending not only on academic level but also on the teaching style of the instructor.

The most common types of courses are as follows:

Undergraduate courses: large group **lectures** supplemented by smaller discussion sessions, especially in the first 2 years of study.

- Note: Discussion groups are sometimes taught by advanced graduate students called Teaching Assistants (TAs).

Graduate courses and some upper level undergraduate courses: seminars, involving discussion between students and professors.

- Note: In a seminar, students may be required to make individual or group presentations based on class discussion, research, or assigned reading.

READING ASSIGNMENTS & HOMEWORK

- At Stanford, professors will generally base their lectures and seminars on required reading and written assignments that you have completed (--or problem sets in the case of technical or quantitative classes).
- If you have not completed the assignments, you may not be able to follow the lecture or participate in the seminar discussion.
- You will be expected to “keep up” with reading and written assignments each week, and your course grade may be based on your written homework grades.

PAPERS

- In many courses you may be required to write a **paper** based on in-class study or independent research you may have done in the library or in a laboratory.

GROUP PROJECTS

- You may be asked to complete an assignment outside of class with a group of your fellow students, and present a written or oral summary of your work together.
- This **group work** method is growing in popularity at Stanford.
- Be sure that you understand how your professor will evaluate group work, and how much collaboration is allowed on the assignments that you turn in as a group and individually.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

- Your professor may use a lecture or seminar style that requires class participation.
- You may be required to **answer questions in class** directed at you by your professor.
- You may be evaluated on **the amount you contribute to class discussions**.

PRESENTATIONS

- Instead of, or in addition to your paper, you may be required to **present your work in front of the professor and your classmates**, as part your grade for the course.
- Presentation styles will vary from culture to culture, so be sure that you understand the style and content that your professor requires.
- Practice your presentation with some friends as your audience, to assess your pronunciation, and style of your presentation.

EXAMINATIONS

At Stanford University you will take many **exams**.

- Most classes have a **final exam** at the end of the quarter.
- One or more **midterm exams** are also common.
- In- class exams (**quizzes**) may also be given.
- **Take-home exams** will be completed outside of class, according to rules specified by the professor.
- **Objective (fill-in the blank, write the formula, etc.)** and **subjective (essay)** exams are given.

EVALUATION/GRADING

- At Stanford, professors have different ways of evaluating the students.
- Some professors prefer to use a formula based on the relative performance of other students, while some use a fixed scale.
- Be sure that you understand how your course grade will be calculated, and how each component of the course is weighted: class participation, homework, group work, presentations, papers, exams.

Goals of the Stanford Academic System

As you begin to experience the teaching and evaluation methods described above, you may wonder why things are this way at Stanford.

The teaching methods at Stanford reflect the goals of Stanford's academic system—what professors hope you will achieve here and carry with you through your career.

LEARNING AUTONOMY

- Your Stanford professors want you to **be an independent learner**.
- Stanford faculty believe that by creating a proper learning environment, students can be motivated to take responsibility for their own education.
- They see their role as **a facilitator and mediator of learning**—not as the SOURCE of all knowledge.

PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING

- Stanford students are often encouraged to participate in classroom discussions.
- To question or challenge the instructor is in fact viewed by most Stanford professors as a healthy sign of interest and original thought, not disrespect.
- This contributes to the professor's role of facilitator or guide of classroom learning.

EMPHASIS ON INDEPENDENT THINKING

- At Stanford, you will find that memorizing material is considered less important than synthesizing ideas from a variety of sources.
- You will be expected to bring new ideas forward, in class, in exams, in papers, in presentations, in group work, and in office hours with your professor.

ACTIVE LEARNING—TAKE INTELLECTUAL RISKS--LEARN FROM MISTAKES

- Stanford encourages its teachers and students to be creative and risk-taking by accepting their mistakes, in pursuit of new ideas.
- Most professors here use teaching as a source for new ideas.
- Lectures and seminars will explore new ideas, based on reading and homework assignments.

Tips for Academic Success: Make the most of your Stanford Education Advice from International Stanford Alumni

We have asked recent Stanford international alumni what tips they have for academic success and here are their answers.

- Balance your course load each quarter.
 - Don't overload your schedule to finish course requirements early.
 - Discuss courses with your advisor and fellow students.
 - Choose a mix of more and less demanding courses each quarter.
- Stay on top of your assignments, don't fall behind.
 - Create a master schedule of your assignments for all classes and plan your time.
 - Allow extra time to complete assignments if English is not your first language. Reading and writing academic English takes extra time.
- Consult your professors when you have questions about course work.
 - Part of the academic culture at Stanford is weekly office hours for all professors.

- Office hours are an opportunity to get to know your professors and to ask questions about assignments and course ideas you are struggling with.
- Many teaching assistants hold office hours and study sessions.
- Take courses outside your degree requirements.
 - Explore the incredible wealth of Stanford classes available, and expand your circle of friends and contacts.
- Consult other students.—especially students who have been in the department longer.
 - Their experiences may be valuable in helping you with your study methods, or in showing you how an academic department functions.
- Use Stanford resources to improve your academic English and study skills—sign up early!
 - At Stanford, there are classes and other one-on-one programs designed to enhance your academic skills in English.
 - [English for Foreign Students](#): this Stanford program offers academic speaking and writing courses for graduate students.
 - [Program in Writing and Rhetoric](#): works one-on-one with undergraduates to improve their academic writing.
 - [The Hume Writing Center](#): offers writing consultant and other programs to improve academic writing to undergraduates and graduate students.
 - [The Center for Teaching and Learning](#): offers programs, individual counseling, and course work. CTL assists students in improving their ability to read with speed and comprehension, study efficiently, and learn material more thoroughly.

Content Credits:

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Updated: August 2011