

Systems compared: the US and the UK

In US universities, many of the words for people and places are the same as those used in the UK (see Unit 18), but there are some differences.

A Terms with different meanings in US and UK university systems

US example	meaning/comment	UK example	meaning/comment
Are you faculty or student?	If you are <i>faculty</i> , you are a member of the academic staff.	The faculty will have to come to a decision on this.	<i>Faculty</i> refers to a group of departments (see Unit 18) with similar interests.
The grading rubric for term papers has been revised.	A <i>rubric</i> is a set of criteria or guidelines which tells how an assignment will be graded or scored.	Some students misread the exam rubric and didn't answer enough questions.	Instructions on an exam paper or in a textbook as to <i>how</i> a task must be done.
I went to college in St Louis. I attended Washington University . I took some fascinating courses at college .	The word <i>college</i> in American English refers broadly to the undergraduate experience, whether it is at a two-year community college, a four-year college, or a large state university in the US. A specific institution can be a college (granting undergraduate degrees only) or a university (granting undergraduate and graduate degrees).	She went to university in Scotland. She graduated from university in 1996.	In British English, <i>university</i> refers to the undergraduate experience. In both American and British English, no article is used before <i>college</i> or <i>university</i> in these examples.
Her brother went to school at Harvard.	<i>School</i> is often used to mean <i>university</i> . A common question is 'Where did you go to school?' meaning 'Where did you go to college?'	I went to school in London, then I went to university in Bristol.	Refers to primary or secondary education; <i>school</i> can also refer to a university department which covers several different teaching areas (e.g. School of English and Journalism).

B Different US terms

I wonder who should be on my PhD committee¹. My advisor² suggested Dr Fry and Dr Roe. I have a lot of studying to do. I have my comps³ in two weeks.

Let's meet in Harley Commons⁴ at 7.30 pm, and we can study for tomorrow's quiz⁵, OK? It was tough being a freshman⁶ because I wasn't used to such difficult finals⁷, but life got a bit easier when I became a sophomore⁸. It was easy enough as a junior⁹, but then it got tough again when I was a senior¹⁰.

As a graduate student¹¹, I get to attend seminars with some of the top people in my field. The fraternity¹² and sorority¹³ houses are all round the edge of the campus.

¹ a group of teachers who advise a PhD student ² equivalent of the UK *supervisor* (see Unit 18) ³ short for *comprehensive examinations*, subject-area tests required of graduate students in some areas of studies ⁴ area where students can meet socially and eat in dining halls ⁵ short test on areas which have been taught ⁶ new, first-year undergraduate (also used in the UK) ⁷ final examinations at the end of the semester ⁸ second-year student, from the Greek *sophos*, wise, and *moros*, dull ⁹ third-year student ¹⁰ fourth-year student ¹¹ student with a bachelor's degree (e.g. BA, BS) who is enrolled in a master's degree programme, equivalent of *postgraduate* student in the UK ¹² a social organisation for male students ¹³ a social organisation for female students

Exercises

19.1 Look at A. Who is more likely to be speaking – a British person or an American? Why?

1 Only faculty can eat here.

2 All professors use the same rubric for grading term papers.

3 I went to school at Millintown, where I got my masters and PhD.

4 My department is within the Faculty of Engineering.

5 The rubric required students to answer all three questions on the exam paper.

19.2 Put these levels of student in an American university in order of seniority, starting with the first-year student. Explain what kind of student each term refers to.

graduate student junior freshman senior sophomore

19.3 Are the following statements true or false? If false, explain why they are incorrect.

- 1 An advisor is someone who helps American students with their emotional problems.
- 2 Women usually join a fraternity.
- 3 Finals means a student's last semester at university or college.
- 4 A PhD committee is a group of graduate students.

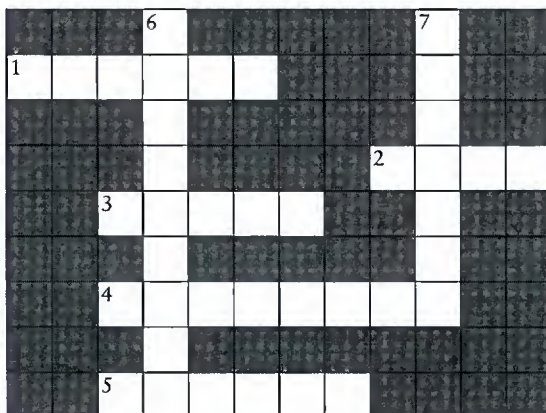
19.4 Use the clues to complete the crossword.

Across

- 1 Sometimes used to refer to college or university in the US
- 2 A short test of material that has been taught
- 3 Test to assess whether a student knows subject material required for a graduate degree
- 4 A social organisation for female students
- 5 A fourth-year student in the US

Down

- 6 A second-year student
- 7 A general word meaning academic staff in the US



A

Course descriptions

Look at this extract from a UK university's web pages. American websites may use different terms.

Diploma/MA in English Language and Culture

- * **Qualification:** **Diploma**¹ or **MA**. **Duration:** One year full-time or two years part-time. The course is a 180-credit² course, consisting of 120 credits of **core**³ and **elective**⁴ **modules**⁵ plus a 60-credit dissertation module. Core modules are **obligatory**. **Candidates** not wishing to **proceed** to the MA may **opt for**⁶ the Diploma (120 credits without dissertation).
- * **Course description:** The course covers all the major aspects of present-day English language and culture. Topics include grammar, vocabulary, language in society, literature in English (for a full list, see the [list of modules](#)). Elective modules only run if a minimum of ten students **enrol**⁷. The modules consist of a mixture of **lectures**, **seminars**, **workshops** and **tutorials**⁸.
- * **Assessment**⁹: A 3,000-word **assignment**¹⁰ must be submitted for each core module. Elective modules are assessed through **essays**, **projects** and **portfolios**¹¹. The **word limit** for the dissertation is 12,000 to 15,000 words. Candidates must achieve a pass grade in all four core modules (20 credits each), plus 40 credits in elective modules (minimum of 30 credits in the English department plus 10 **optional** credits from modules offered by other departments), and, for MA, must pass the dissertation module (60 credits). Candidates who achieve a grade average of 70% or more over all modules may be **eligible**¹² for a **distinction**¹³.

¹ a qualification between a bachelor's degree and a master's degree ² unit which represents a successfully completed part of a course ³ most important parts of a course of study, that all students must do ⁴ which are chosen ⁵ one of the units which together make a complete course taught especially at a college or university ⁶ choose ⁷ put one's name on an official list of course members ⁸ see Unit

18 for the meaning of these; a workshop is a meeting to discuss and/or perform practical work in a subject ⁹ judgements of the quality of students' work ¹⁰ a piece of written work ¹¹ a collection of documents that represent a person's work ¹² having the necessary qualities or fulfilling the necessary conditions ¹³ a special mark given to students who produce work of an excellent standard

B

Other aspects of courses

Dr Ward is holding a question-and-answer session for new MA students.

Reza: Can we defer¹ the dissertation if we can't stay here during the summer?

Dr Ward: Yes, you can defer for a year, but don't forget, if you do go home, you won't be able to have face-to-face supervisions².

Simon: Are the in-session³ language courses compulsory?

Dr Ward: No. Most of you did the pre-session³, which is the most important. But there are good in-session³ courses you can sign up for, especially the EAP⁴ writing course.

Angela: If we get the MA, can we go on to do a PhD immediately?

Dr Ward: Not automatically. You have to show you can do PhD standard work first anyway, and then upgrade⁵ to the PhD programme after a year or so.

¹ delay until a later time ² individual meetings with the teacher who is responsible for the student's dissertation ³ courses held during the main teaching semesters; pre-session³ courses are held before the main teaching semesters begin ⁴ English for Academic Purposes ⁵ become officially registered for the higher degree



When addressing someone with a PhD, always use their family name, e.g. *Excuse me, Dr Lopez*. Only medical doctors can be addressed simply as *Doctor*, without using their family name.

Exercises

20.1 Answer the questions about the text in A.

- 1 How long does the Diploma or MA course take if you study full-time?
- 2 How many credits is a dissertation worth?
- 3 What is special about core modules?
- 4 What is the difference between doing a Diploma and an MA?
- 5 How many students are required for an elective module to run?
- 6 How long do assignments have to be?
- 7 What kinds of classes do the students get?
- 8 On what kinds of work are they assessed?
- 9 What is the maximum number of words allowed in a dissertation?
- 10 What do students have to do to get a distinction?

20.2 Complete the missing words in this email from a student to a friend.

Diploma dissertation in-sessional MA module PhD project sign

Hi Erika,

How are things going with you? I'm sorry not to have written to you sooner but I've been desperately busy with the linguistics (1) I have to do for the elective (2) I'm taking this term. It's really interesting and I think I might decide to do my final (3) on a similar topic. At first I was only planning to do the (4) but now I've decided to have a go at an (5) I might even (6) up for a (7) if they'll have me! PhD students are usually offered some language teaching on the (8) EAP courses they run for foreign students, so it would be useful for my CV for the future.

Shoshana

20.3 Choose the correct word to complete each sentence.

- 1 I started out doing an MA but then decided to *upgrade / defer* to a PhD.
- 2 Students whose first language is not English usually have to attend a(n) *in-sessional / pre-sessional* language course before their main classes start.
- 3 Only six students have *enrolled / opted*, so the MEd programme will not run this year.
- 4 Most students decide to *sign / proceed* to the MA after completing their Diploma course.
- 5 Core modules are *obligatory / optional*.
- 6 When I was doing my PhD I had monthly *one-to-one seminars / supervisions*.
- 7 I won't be able to finish the dissertation this year, so I'll have to *opt / defer* till next year.
- 8 *Assessment / Assignment* consists of a three-hour end-of-module exam.

20.4 Complete the table below. Use a dictionary to help you if necessary.



verb	noun	adjective
opt		
		obligatory
	supervision +	
	assessment +	-
-		eligible

FOLLOW UP Compare your own course, or one you hope to do, with the course described in A in terms of duration, modules and assessment.