



SWITZERLAND

Brief Background: Switzerland is most known for watchmaking, cheese, and chocolate, but it is also a very innovative and sustainable country. Switzerland has a population of 8.6 million, and a quarter of the population is non-Swiss.

Switzerland has four national languages—German, French, Italian, and Romansch—so you can take comfort as a foreign visitor or resident that the Swiss are accustomed to different languages within their country.

The country is divided into 26 cantons or states. Most undergraduate programs in Switzerland are still taught in the cantonal/regional language, with a few bilingual programs or English language programs offered. This does change, however, for the master's and doctoral level, where more bilingual and English programs are offered.

Switzerland's university system is based on three pillars: fundamental research, applied sciences and arts, and teacher education. Each university type serves a specific purpose in Swiss education, research, and innovation. Switzerland also boasts several private universities, primarily focused in the hospitality industry. The main organization of Swiss universities—[swissuniversities](#)—promotes cooperation and coordination among the institutions.

Research Universities

The oldest university in Switzerland—the University of Basel, founded in 1460—is one of 12 publicly funded research universities. Two of these institutions are federal research universities—ETH in Zurich and EPFL

in Lausanne—that have consistently ranked among the top universities worldwide. The other 10 universities are cantonal public universities divided by linguistic region:

- German-Speaking—University of Basel, University of Bern, University of Lucerne, University of St. Gallen, University of Zurich
- French-Speaking—University of Geneva, University of Lausanne, University of Neuchâtel
- Bilingual German and French-Speaking—University of Fribourg
- Italian-Speaking—University of Lugano

For the 2020-21 academic year, research universities enrolled approximately 164,575 students—80,250 of whom were studying at the bachelor's level. Of those students, 16,650 were non-Swiss nationals and only a small number were US citizens.

Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts

The country also offers nine universities of applied sciences and arts—one private and eight public—with about 95,000 students enrolled. These schools are closely linked to the economy, culture, and society. They promote close partnerships with companies, institutions, and other organizations in the educational sector. The Swiss universities of applied sciences and arts prioritize practice-relevant degrees and continuing education.

Teacher Education, Conservatories, and Theology Schools

The universities of teacher training, of which there are 20, have nearly 21,000 students enrolled. The country also has two conservatories in Lugano and Geneva and three theology schools in Lugano, Basel, and Chur.

UNIVERSITIES OF APPLIED SCIENCES ARE HIGHLY INTERNATIONAL

- Bern University of Applied Sciences (10% international Students)
- FHNW University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (9% international students)
- HES-SO University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland (27% international students)
- Kalaidos University of Applied Sciences (14.3% international students)
- Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (5% international students)
- OST Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences (5% international students)
- University of Applied Sciences and Arts of Southern Switzerland (SUPSI) (33% international students)
- University of Applied Sciences of the Grisons (3% international students)
- Zurich University of Applied Sciences and Arts (4.7% international students)

Private Universities

Switzerland is also very well-known for hospitality management, with schools such as Ecole hôtelière de Lausanne (EHL), which was founded back in 1893 and is considered the oldest hospitality school in the world. EHL holds a dual accreditation from the Haute Ecole Spécialisée de Suisse Occidentale (HES-SO) and the New England Commission of Higher Education in the US. Other institutions include Glion and Les Roches, as well as the Swiss Education Group, which includes the Cezar Ritz Colleges, SHMS Swiss Hotel Management School, HIM Hotel Institute Montreux, and the Culinary Arts Academy Switzerland.

Switzerland also has two accredited American universities. Franklin University Switzerland, located in Lugano, was established in 1969 and holds dual accreditation from the Swiss Accreditation Council and the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in the US. Webster University Geneva, established in 1978, is an international campus of Webster University in St. Louis, Missouri. Both of these universities welcome a number of students from the US as degree-seeking as well as visiting, study abroad students.

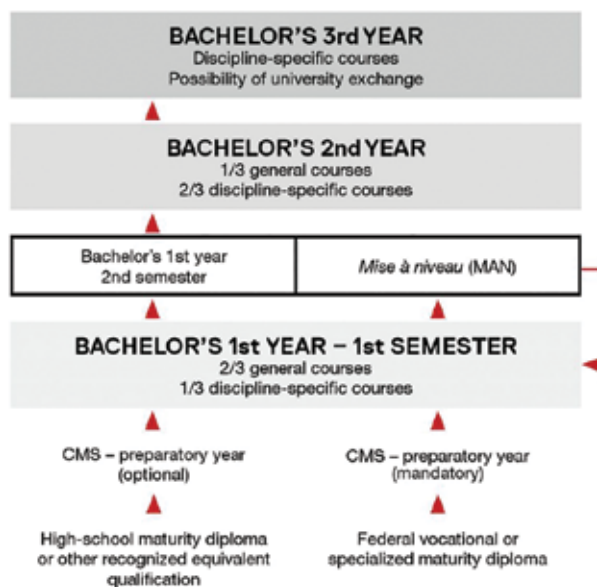
The Swiss University Conference and its accreditation body—Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (AAQ)—safeguards and promotes quality teaching and research at universities in Switzerland. It is independent, uses internationally

recognized methods, and is able to draw upon the knowledge and experience of leading experts. It perceives its role as an external partner for quality assurance and development and provides a range of supporting services. The AAQ is also part of the European Quality Assurance Registration for Higher Education.

Good to Know: Switzerland is part of the European Higher Education Area and follows a system similar to other European countries. Bachelor's degree programs usually require three years of study, achieving 180 credits within the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).

For some Swiss universities the curriculum is divided into a first exploratory year—sometimes called *propaedeutic cycle*—followed by two years with a higher percentage of courses in the chosen field of study. Students apply to specific programs/majors. Some universities give students the option to change programs after admission, but before enrolling. Others will require you to reapply all together.

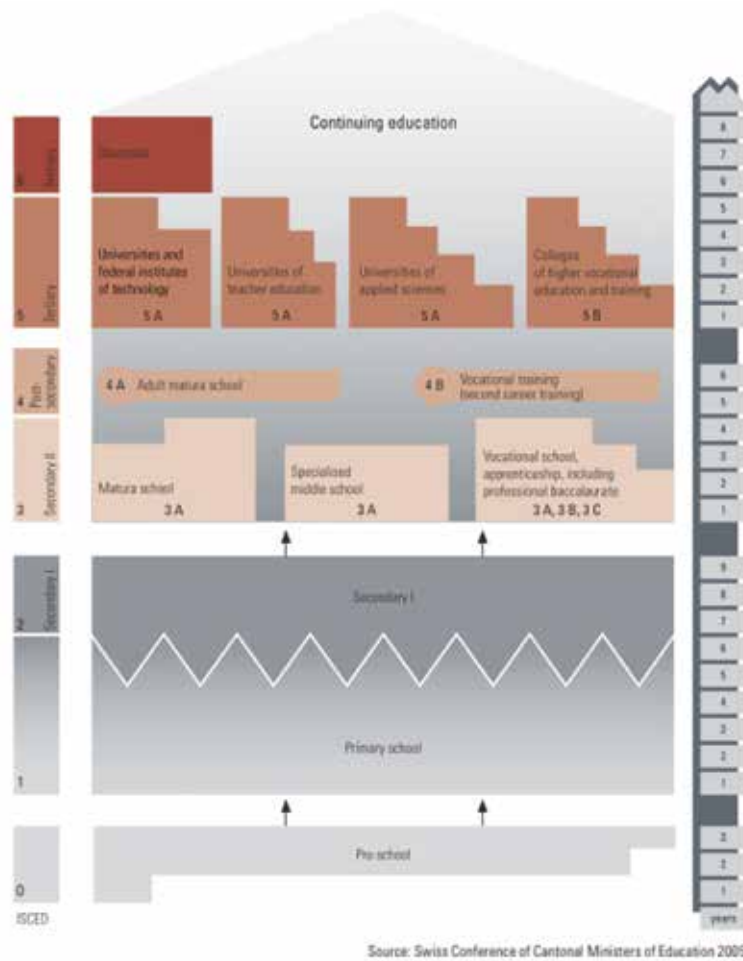
The possibility to study abroad for one year is offered under certain conditions. Switzerland is no longer part of the European Erasmus program, but it does value student mobility and supports a number of study abroad options for students in collaboration with partner universities worldwide.



Source: EPFL, 2021

Sustainable development initiatives are increasingly part of Swiss universities. One program of swissuniversities is the Development and Cooperation Network (SUDAC), which aims to consolidate and promote universities' efforts related to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Switzerland with higher education partners in the global south. In 2019, the SUDAC program started a policy dialogue on the relevance of SDGs in Swiss higher education.

Diagram of the Swiss Education System



Students take their courses during the academic term and then have several weeks to prepare for the examination period. Exams begin at the end of January or start of February (autumn semester) and then at the end of June or start of July (spring semester). Usually, exams run over a three-week period.

Search: Prospective students can search for university options through [Study in Switzerland+](#). Students can search based on the type of university, location, or the course of study. A summary of the university's programs, number of international students, and ranking are provided, along with a link to each university's website.

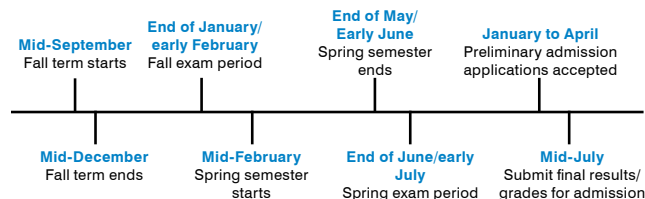
Apply: There is no common application in Switzerland. Students must apply to each individual university.

Most universities follow a two-part application process. Part one generally requires an application, photo, passport copy, and the intermediary grades from the last two years of secondary school, as well as language certification. The second part includes final grades, transcript, and diplomas.

Most universities of applied sciences and arts will not admit students with only a high school diploma and will ask for at least one year of practical, internship, or work experience relevant to the degree.

After temporarily suspending entry in response to COVID-19, Switzerland has been processing student visas since June 2020 and has not restricted access for students entering Switzerland for study purposes. As a result, the country witnessed an above-average increase in foreign student enrollments. Switzerland's universities opened in-person teaching in June 2020. The restriction for online learning implemented in November 2020 and was lifted in April 2021.

Academic Calendar: The academic year in Switzerland is split into two semesters or terms: autumn and spring. Fall term starts around the second or third week of September and runs through the third week of December. Spring term starts around the third week of February and runs through the end of May or early June. With a few exceptions, courses at Swiss universities start with the autumn semester in September.



Deadlines: Many Swiss universities will accept first/ preliminary applications from January to the end of April. The second part of the application (final results/grades) are submitted by mid-July.

Students who require a visa to study in Switzerland are encouraged to submit the first part of the application by the end of February.

Application Fees: For Swiss citizens most application fees are 50 Swiss francs, while non-Swiss students pay 150 Swiss francs per application.

Admission Requirements: Swiss universities look strictly at the student's secondary school qualifications across specific subjects and are very transparent about curriculum requirements for foreign, non-Swiss degree applicants. They offer specific guidelines for various types of curriculum, by country and by system, such as International Baccalaureate (IB), A-levels, etc.

The [swissuniversities website](#) provides an overview of requirements based on the student's country. Institutions' websites will give more specific guidelines for each education system worldwide and note the standards each candidate must achieve to be considered for admission.

For the US, the general list includes classes in English, a second language, mathematics, natural sciences (biology, chemistry, and physics), humanities and social sciences (geography, history, economics/law), and electives taken during the last three years of secondary school. Most universities will require five Advanced Placement (AP) subject tests in particular areas with scores of 3 or higher (several AP subjects are not recognized, such as art history and psychology), or two years of university-level work on top of the applicant's high school diploma. If students are enrolled in the IB program, they will also have specific subject requirements, including a strong preference that higher level (HL) subjects include a math and/or science. The 10 cantonal universities ask for a minimum IB score of 32/42, while the research institutes—ETH and EPFL—ask for a minimum score of 38/42.

Some Swiss universities allow students who do not qualify based on their secondary school performance to take an entrance examination. Based on the student's background there are partial- and full- examination options. A university official can recommend which option is right for you. Registration tends to happen in the fall (September-December) and the examinations take place in May.

Because most programs in Switzerland are taught in German, French, and Italian, language proficiency is key. The majority of programs ask for a C1 level based on the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages \(CEFR\)](#). Most universities recommend sending language proficiency certification along with the application, however it can also be submitted later. Some universities will waive the language requirement if the completion of the last three years at an upper secondary school was in the language of instruction relevant for the studies and in a region where the official language is the same as the language of instruction.

Swiss citizens living abroad will follow a similar application process, as their university entrance will still be determined by their secondary school academic curriculum.

Upon Acceptance: For most Swiss universities, students apply with preliminary results and will be asked to submit their final grades, scores, and diplomas in order to finalize their acceptance at a later date. This usually occurs in mid-July unless students are part of a system where final grades are released at a later time.

Conditional acceptance is offered pending results of language proficiency exams, final grades, or AP or IB results.

Deadlines related to acceptance need to be adhered to without exception. Students cannot defer and will need to reapply to change the program of acceptance or the term.



Tuition and Fees: Swiss university costs are relatively low due to federal funding that helps support the universities. The range is between 500 Swiss francs to 4,000 Swiss francs per semester for international students, with the majority of institutions charging less than 1,000 Swiss francs. The universities of applied sciences have very similar costs, generally ranging from about 800 to 5,000 Swiss francs. Tuition at private institutions can reach up to 10,000 Swiss francs.

Some universities provide small scholarships and stipends, but due to the low costs, universities typically do not offer financial support. In partnership with several countries, the Swiss government offers scholarships for international students. Most scholarships are available for postgraduate or doctorate degrees; however, it is important to contact the university to determine its undergraduate scholarship and grant availability.

One thing to keep in mind is that even though tuition costs are low, especially when compared to costs at many US colleges and universities, Switzerland is an expensive country in which to live. Zurich and Geneva tend to appear on top 10 lists of the most expensive cities worldwide.

Most universities will also have small fees for access to student identification cards and other benefits offered to students and student organizations.

Students are typically not required to pay the tuition prior to enrollment. Billing is generally sent at the start of the semester once the student has officially checked into the university.

For Swiss citizens living abroad, the costs of the programs will be slightly cheaper and assistance from the Swiss government is available if they cannot fully fund their studies.

Housing: Swiss students generally either live in shared flats, with their parents, or in a rented apartment or studio within a commutable distance via bicycle or public transportation. Residence hall rooms are limited. With average rental prices of more than 2,000 Swiss francs per month in Geneva and Zurich, shared flats are the most common form of accommodation for students and young professionals. StudyinSwitzerland.plus provides an overview of all possible accommodations in the different Swiss cities.

Monthly rents for rooms in a shared flat can range from around 400 to 900 Swiss francs or more, depending on the size of the flat, the available room, and the flat's location. As a general rule of thumb, the further away from the city center, the lower the price. You will need to weigh the cost of public transportation against the lower cost of rent.

Switzerland has an amazing transportation system so students don't always feel the need to be as close as possible to the university. Many Swiss universities are also spread out across different locations in a city. Trains, buses, and trams are all linked under the same Swiss network, [SBB/CFF/FFS](#), depending on the language region. There are also popular bike shares in cities as well as car-share options like [Mobility](#).

For young people, generally under the age of 26, there are numerous discounts available. For the Swiss residency permit, students will need a signed contract and a permanent address, so it is important to research housing options as soon as possible. Airbnb locations are not considered primary residences.

Visa and Other Permits: Students who are Swiss nationals but residing in another country have the option to be registered in Switzerland during their studies or retain their abroad status as a Swiss with their local embassy in whichever country they consider home. This is a choice for the student and would have an impact on voting and taxes, as well as military service.

European citizens studying in Switzerland can enter the country and register themselves with their local town hall by presenting the necessary documentation including a criminal record certificate from their EU country. They do not require a visa prior to their arrival.

Student Visa

For all other nationalities, students are required to obtain a Swiss National Type D Visa for stays of more than 90 days/ three months. This visa is processed ahead of time with the Swiss Embassy in the student's country of residence. In the US, students will gather the necessary documents and then mail them to the Swiss Embassy in either San Francisco, Atlanta, New York, or Washington, DC, based on their home address. The process can take four to 12 weeks. Once the student arrives in Switzerland, they will present themselves to their local town hall within two weeks of arrival to start the process for their Swiss residency permit. Students from Singapore, Japan, New Zealand, Brunei, and Malaysia are exempt from the visa requirement.

Students are generally asked for their visa application, passport copies, passport photos, documents and diplomas of their previous study, *résumé*/CV, motivation statement as well as future plans, official enrollment certificates or university acceptance letters, and a statement that they will leave Switzerland after completing their studies. More information on visas is provided by the [Federal Department of Foreign Affairs](#).

Students are also asked for financial/bank documents. For the public system, students should show sufficient funds for residing in Switzerland. This requires a confirmation from a Swiss-domiciled bank (foreign bank with a branch in Switzerland, or a Swiss bank with a branch in your home country) stating that you have access to the equivalent of 21,000 Swiss francs at the beginning of your studies. A list of all approved banks in Switzerland has been published by Finma: [FINMA List of Authorized Banks and Securities Dealers](#). The account must be held in the student's name and the currency must be Swiss francs, euros, or US dollars. Letters of support or bank statements from parents or relatives will not be accepted by most public universities.

For private institutions, the authorities do not look for a specific amount of money as the university will usually issue a letter that all finances have been reviewed and that the university is guiding the student through the necessary steps under Swiss law. If they have received scholarships or have a sponsor, they can include that information. If they are dependents, they can include information from their parents or guardians.

In most countries, applying for the Swiss student visa is free of charge, however that may vary.

Swiss visa applications are sent to the immigration office in the canton where the student will be studying. Students from certain countries may also require a secondary approval at the federal level.

Residency Permits

Non-Swiss nationals will need to obtain a Swiss Residency Permit for any long-term stay program of more than three months. Most students will receive a B status permit that is valid for one year and will be renewed for any subsequent year of study in the country.

Employment

During the semester, students may accept a paid part-time job of no more than 15 hours a week. Full-time employment is permitted during the lecture-free period.

Job-seeking after graduation is a bit more complicated for third country nationals (excluding Swiss nationals and citizens of countries within the European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA)). Only if you graduate from a Swiss accredited university, can a foreign student obtain a residency permit for six months to look for a job in Switzerland that is consistent with their qualification. Swiss citizens have greater options to look for employment following graduation.

Students will need to submit their certified letter from the university confirming the end of study, show that they have the necessary financial means to remain in Switzerland, and have suitable housing.

The six-month residence permit cannot be extended and will allow the student to work for only 15 hours per week. If a student finds a position, their employer will guide them through the new residency permit application.

Please note students who come from non-EU countries (including the UK) will have to apply for their work permit at the cantonal Office for Economy and Labour (*Amt für Wirtschaft und Arbeit – AWA*). This is only possible once a student has received their residence permit.

Health Insurance

Health insurance is mandatory in Switzerland and offered through private providers. [Comparis](#) can offer several comparisons and evaluations of different health insurance policies. It's also possible to take out an international student health insurance policy that is recognized in Switzerland (e.g., Swisscare). Proof of insurance will be required when students obtain their residency permit.

Advice from the Field:

Switzerland has several private day and boarding schools with a robust university counselor community that has been very helpful in supporting anyone interested in studying in Switzerland. American universities like Franklin University Switzerland and Webster University Geneva, as well as the hospitality management schools, can also serve as reliable resources.



Because Switzerland hosts numerous international companies and organizations, there are plenty of job opportunities available for foreigners. Employers are looking for qualified candidates and will assist with the necessary work permits for those they want to hire. It's always best for students to network throughout their university experience and take advantage of internships, traineeships, and other work as permitted by their visa.

There are a number of expatriate groups, such as [InterNations](#), and societies for both social and networking opportunities.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

START HERE

LEARN EVERYWHERE

41
2021
MOST INNOVATIVE UNIVERSITY

U.S. AND SWISS ACCREDITATION

SCHOLARSHIPS & FINANCIAL AID OPTIONS

HYBRID MODEL (COVID-19)

WWW.FUS.EDU