International Student Questions & Answers
the questions asked most frequently by applicants from overseas
SWARTHTMORE COLLEGE

Q: HOW MANY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DOES SWARTHMORE COLLEGE HAVE?
A: Of Swarthmore’s student body of 1500, approximately 10 percent are international students or U.S. citizens and permanent residents who have graduated from secondary schools abroad.

In the Class of 2015, about 7 percent of the foreign national applicants were admitted.

Q: IS FINANCIAL AID AVAILABLE TO FOREIGN NATIONAL STUDENTS?
A: Financial aid consideration is available to foreign national students who are applying as freshmen. No financial aid is available for foreign national transfers, so the College does not accept transfer applications from foreign national students who require aid.

Financial aid is need-based, and the financial aid award includes a combination of scholarship and a campus job opportunity. About half the total student body receives College financial support, and about one half of the foreign national students are aided. Early Decision and Regular Decision applicants receive the same financial aid consideration.

It is very important to complete the financial aid application required by our Financial Aid Office on time and before you are admitted. We cannot consider aid applications after admission is offered.

Q: IS ADMISSION NEED-BLIND FOR FOREIGN NATIONAL STUDENTS?
A: No, admission is need-blind only for U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents. However, if you are admitted and have applied for aid prior to admission, the College will meet your demonstrated need, up to and including full tuition, room, board, books, and supplies.

Q: WHAT KIND OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS ARE PRESENT ON CAMPUS?
A: There are several student-run international student groups at Swarthmore. The largest is the International Club (also known as I-20), which boasts more than 120 members. Other active campus groups include: SAO (Swarthmore Asian Organization), Deshi (Swarthmore South Asian Organization), SOCA (Swarthmore Students of Caribbean Ancestry), Enlace (Hispanic/Latino Organization), SASA (Swarthmore African Students Association), Han (Korean Organization), and MECS (Middle Eastern Cultural Society).

Activities of such groups include organizing cultural presentations on campus, promoting cultural togetherness, encouraging diversity, and educating fellow community members about other cultures. They also sponsor social activities on weekends to which the entire student body is invited.

Q: IS THERE A TYPICAL SWARTHMORE STUDENT?
A: Although it is difficult to stereotype “Swatties” because each is a unique individual in a community where differences are appreciated, common characteristics are intellectual passion, self-motivation, personal integrity, concern for others, creativity, and energy. Swatties like to have fun and seek a healthy balance between their academic and social lives.
Q: WHAT IS THE LEVEL OF ACADEMIC INTENSITY AT SWARTHMORE COMPARED TO OTHER COLLEGES?

A: Swarthmore is a highly selective American undergraduate school, so the entering students are among the most academically able and motivated in the world. It is a college where intellectual curiosity is strongly valued, and where the learning style is collaborative, not competitive. You can spend four years here without anyone asking you what grade you received in a course! Graduate schools and potential employers recruit actively at Swarthmore because of their respect for the rigorous academic program here.

Q: WHAT DO SWARTHMORE STUDENTS DO FOR FUN?

A: Swarthmore is a self-contained campus where one need not leave campus to explore a diversity of social options. Every weekend many all-campus parties, athletic events, performances, conferences, movies, and informal coffee house-type conversations are held, and entry is free to all students.

There is a 25-minute direct train line to Philadelphia, which is a transportation hub for the East Coast. New York and Washington, D.C. are less than two hours away. Philadelphia International Airport is about 15 minutes away by car.

Q: HOW COMMITTED TO WORK ARE SWARTHMORE STUDENTS?

A: Students at Swarthmore work very hard, especially those majoring in engineering or completing pre-medicine requirements; however, this amount of work is comparable to the amount of work at other highly selective colleges, and it may seem more interesting due to the interactive classroom environment.

Q: HOW "GLOBAL" IS SWARTHMORE?

A: Swarthmore students actively seek global perspectives in both their academic and personal lives—hence the warm ambiance for international students. More than 40% of Swarthmore students study abroad during their undergraduate years. People at Swarthmore tend to be issue-oriented, so they care deeply about what is happening in other countries.

Q: HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO ADAPT TO LIFE AT AN AMERICAN COLLEGE LIKE SWARTHMORE?

A: Adaptation to life at Swarthmore depends on each individual. Some people adjust immediately, while others take a little longer, but the non-competitive, highly inclusive culture encourages an easy transition. Many international students prefer this strong sense of community because they know people care about them as individuals.

Q: WHAT KINDS OF ATTITUDES SHOULD ONE BRING TO AN AMERICAN COLLEGE LIKE SWARTHMORE?

A: Open-mindedness and flexibility are at the top of the list. Some students coming from abroad view U.S. customs as very liberal, while others may consider the attitudes of U.S. students to be provincial. The important thing to note about this kind of "culture shock" is that with an open mind, you can appreciate social, cultural, and ethnic differences without negating your own values or background.

Q: WHAT KIND OF SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE TO FOREIGN STUDENTS ONCE ON CAMPUS?

A: Our Foreign Student Adviser is responsible for much of the on-campus support available to international students, but other offices provide the same caring support that is available to all "Swatties." This includes a 24-hour, 7-day per week staffed health center offering psychological services and access to several local hospitals, academic support, religious and spiritual guidance, etc. The faculty and staff have a long tradition of informally supporting all international students.

Before the official freshman orientation, the College invites international students to a special program that introduces them to the U.S. ("how do I open a bank account?") and to one another ("exactly where is Mauritius?").
Q: ARE THERE ANY SPECIAL TESTS OR REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERNATIONAL APPLICANTS?

A: Apart from submitting certification of your family’s finances, demonstrating excellent English skills (the TOEFL or IELTS is recommended but not required), and securing a valid U.S. visa, there are no special requirements. You should take the SAT reasoning test and two SAT subject tests or the ACT with writing component, if they are available in your country. It is expected that students will be enrolled in the most challenging secondary school curriculum (e.g., A-levels) available to them. You will complete the same academic requirements to graduate as any other Swarthmore student.

If you have a passport, please send us a photocopy of the information page.

Q: WHAT ABOUT DOCUMENT AND TEST SCORE AUTHENTICITY?

A: It is the applicant’s responsibility to provide authentic documentation of all credentials. School transcripts must be original and certified with the school seal, or a high-quality copy must be both certified and signed by the head of school and/or college adviser. Recommendations should be written on official school letterhead, and all official translations should be attached to the original document. SAT scores should be sent directly to Swarthmore College from the Educational Testing Service. In cases where complying with such requirements would cause excessive financial burden to the family, we will accept a high-quality copy of test results that has been certified with the school seal and signed by the head of school and/or college adviser.

Q: WHAT ABOUT CREDIT FOR INTERNATIONAL EXAMS THAT I HAVE TAKEN?

A: At Swarthmore, credit is decided by individual academic departments in consultation with our registrar. Generally, students who have done well on their IB Higher Level exams (scoring 6 or 7), British "A" Levels (earning an A), French Baccalaureate (scoring 15 or higher), or Advanced Placement exams (scoring 4 or 5) receive academic credit and/or advanced placement from most academic departments.

Q: WHAT ABOUT TRANSFERRING TO SWARTHMORE FROM ANOTHER SCHOOL?

A: Swarthmore admits a small number of transfer students each year for September enrollment only. International students who have matriculated at another college or university (in the U.S. or abroad) who require financial aid are not eligible for transfer to Swarthmore, even if they are willing to forego the academic credit they have already earned elsewhere. All foreign national transfer applicants must document their family’s ability to pay for their time at Swarthmore, and must document all courses taken for academic credit or non-credit at all secondary and tertiary educational institutions prior to enrollment at Swarthmore.

Q: WHAT KIND OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE ON AND OFF CAMPUS?

A: On campus, students may work at any one of the libraries, the bookstore, the computing center, in our admissions office or the alumni office, and most other academic or administrative offices, etc. In addition, there are also a wide variety of short-term jobs. Most foreign national students are not permitted to work off-campus because of their visa status. (In order to work off-campus, foreign national students need special employment authorization from the U.S. government. Once this is obtained, you may work anywhere inside the U.S. over the summer or winter breaks, but not during the school year).

The College often is able to facilitate internship applications for foreign national students. Some of these are paid positions and others offer living stipends. The Swarthmore Foundation offers grants to students who engage in social service projects. Externships, which usually involve “shadowing” a Swarthmore alum, can be an exciting way to spend spring break. Many students are offered paid research opportunities on-campus during the summer.

Q: WHAT DO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS DO AFTER GRADUATING?

A: Everything and anything, just like other “Swatties!” They may go to graduate school, take time off, or find jobs (inside or outside the U.S.). Our Career Services Office, as well as the incredibly well-connected faculty, personally assist each student with his or her future plans.