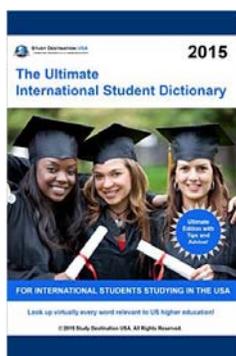


## International Students Dictionary

*The Ultimate International Student Dictionary* (2015). Online: Amazon Digital Services, Inc. \$ 9.99 ASIN: B00S5F19L6

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**Reviewed by** *Karen Johnson (USA) and Lisa Wells (Saudi Arabia)*



According to Study Destination USA's website, *The Ultimate International Student Dictionary for International Students Studying in the USA* was created to give transferring international students help with the unique terminology used in universities and colleges in the United States. From experience, the staff at Study Destination USA understands the challenges future or current international students will experience, such as adapting to a new academic culture to understanding the nuances of the university language. This dictionary could prepare international students in two useful ways. First, it is useful for students and their parents when applying for admissions into US universities. Second, the tips and advice will help first year students adjust to the academic culture and improve their understanding of commonly used university vocabulary. Awareness of these issues and terms can help students more quickly integrate into university life once they arrive in the United States.

Early in their business venture, Study Destination USA officials recognized recurring communication issues between students and universities. This situation created the idea of providing international students a useful word list. Admissions officers and international student recruiters were asked to help identify problematic words that resulted in a dictionary of nearly 300 words.

Dictionary is a loosely used description for the word list. It is similar to a dictionary in that the words are alphabetized, but there the similarities end. Definitions are more often descriptions of the word and its

cultural context to university life. Unlike a dictionary, there are no synonyms, antonyms, example sentences, or pronunciation help.

Intuitively it is reasonable to assume that *The Ultimate International Student Dictionary for International Students Studying in the USA* is useful for its cultural context, but its relaxed dictionary form could be construed as misleading in its simplified definitions and advice. To understand if this might be the case, Dr. Wells asked ten university students, who are studying in Saudi Arabia to review and share their opinion of the dictionary. The response was overwhelmingly positive on three points. First, students did expand their vocabulary in a US culturally based context. Second, they identified differences between the English lexicons used in a US university and their local university. Finally, they were able to identify registration and admissions differences based on the vocabulary meanings used for departments and processes within the University. While discussing the dictionary entries, students became curious enough to locate the dictionary at amazon.com and visit Study Destination USA's website. They found the price very reasonable, the information more than worth the cost, but felt they would not buy the dictionary until they were ready to start applying for a US university. For example, Ashwaq, an English translation student said,

I have seen the list, and it's very informative. I would recommend it. But I have reviewed and talked about it with my friends enough. I might buy it in the future if I am accepted into a US university.

### **Familiar Vocabulary, New Context**

Before reviewing the book, the students thought the book would introduce them to new and strange vocabulary. They were instead surprised to learn how vocabulary could be used in a variety of situations. For example, Sara and Ghada, both French and English translation students, commented on the number of ways the word "academic" is used. The dictionary lists the following uses of the word: academic advisor, academic probation, academic standing, academic suspension, academic dismissal, and academic year. They had never considered that the word academic could refer to such a variety of situations.

### **Comparing British and US Lexicon**

If we accept Zhang's (2010) premise that, "the objective of foreign language teaching is not only to teach students some grammatical rules and vocabularies, but also how to use the knowledge in practice to express or narrate thoughts and ideas" (p. 83), this dictionary is very useful for getting students to collaborate on the meaning of vocabulary. For example, Deema noticed the differences between British and US terms at the university.

Some of these terms included: grade versus mark, freshman versus fresher, Junior versus 3rd year student, and semester versus term. Students also exchanged observed differences in vocabulary usage among their US and British instructors. For example, their US instructors will say, "It's time to take a test." The British instructors would say, "It's time to sit for your exam." They also noticed the different use of 'induction' and 'orientation' materials. The students were encouraged to look up the words in their native language and compare the meanings. They were surprised by the differences, and speculated on the cultural differences.

### **Recognizing Differences between US and Local University Admissions and Registration**

Beck, et al. (2002) wrote about how context clues give students ideas or hints about new words they come across while reading. These clues are found in the text or illustrations surrounding the unknown word. Sometimes this type of vocabulary development can lead to a misunderstanding, referred to as a "misdirective" (Beck, et al., 2002, p. 83). The students seemed to be experiencing a misdirective when they were speculating on differences between their local university system and those in the US. For example, the US term "Add/Drop." In Saudi Arabia, this is called "Course Withdrawal," because students are not given the choice to "Drop". Sara and Ghada were confused and asked if "Add/Drop" had another meaning. The terms seemed to mean they would receive or return something, such as 'drop-off a book' to your teacher. Once the concept was explained, they were amazed that US students had such control over their educational choices. However, it is easy to see that some of the dictionary's terms could be a misdirective.

Although ambitious in its concept, the direct, clear writing makes it easy for students to understand the meaning, cultural context, and advice the authors are striving for in the dictionary. However, it is recommended that someone with knowledge of the US university system be present when students are studying the dictionary to avoid a misdirective or to explain any lingering and confusing lexicon or understanding of the university systems. Overall, this book presents itself as very useful text for non-western students who are attending or planning to attend a US university.

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