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*Every week, education expert Sanjeev Verma will answer your queries on studying abroad. E-mail queries to [features@gulf-times.com](mailto:features@gulf-times.com)*

**What entrance exams are required for admission into US colleges? Are these results the key decisive factor in the application process? -- Alison McCarthy**

When considering an undergraduate or a graduate degree, in all likelihood the aspiring student will have to face some form of mandatory examination or an aptitude test in order to be admitted.

A good number of institutions even state the minimum scores needed to meet the cutoff. So what are these exams and how important are they?

These exams are generally grouped into three types. The first would be the English proficiency tests that are mandatory for citizens of non-English speaking countries, in this case being the IELTS and TOEFL. The second type comprises general aptitude tests like the PSAT, ACT, and SAT (needed for undergraduate admission) and the GMAT and GRE (for graduate entry) predominantly for North America. Third are the discipline focused examinations for law school and medical school like the MCAT, UKCAT, USMLE etc that would be geared towards entry into a particular programme. These tests are conducted by entities such as independent testing centres or professional organisations.

The main objective is to provide a common platform for measuring potentials of all applicants that stem from varied backgrounds and curricula against a uniform set of skills that are mandated by a particular programme.

It equips institutional admissions counsellors with a precise and effective measure, when trying to determine an applicant's potential to join their programme.

There are institutions where these exams aren't mandatory. However, in recent times we have seen an increasing number of institutions making the above mentioned forms of testing compulsory since these tests are indicative about the prospective student's potential and hence it is recommended to take these exams.

*(Sanjeev Verma began with Ernst & Young and progressed to set up the Gulf operations of IDP Education Pty. He now leads Intelligent Partners, developing a wide range of solutions in areas of international education.)*