



ISS

SINGAPORE CAMPUS

HIGH SCHOOL

Realising Potential

University Advising Handbook 2017-2018

Revised 1 August 2017



University Advising Handbook-2017-2018

College is a match to be made, not a prize to be won.

International School of Singapore helps students build on their experiences at ISS and beyond to gain admission into colleges and universities all over the world. Applying to college is exciting for many, but it can also be a stressful and daunting experience for some. These pages are designed to assist with the university selection and application process and to keep you informed of the university application timeline.

The person most responsible for successfully completing the process is you-the student. We are here to guide you and advise you, but you must make the important decisions and follow through in meeting all the college requirements and deadlines. Each student should seek out colleges that best fit their individual learning style, values, personal interests, academic and professional goals etc.

University Advising Services at ISS

The University Advising office at ISS guides and supports students throughout the university application process beginning in Grade 10 and continuing throughout Grade 12.

This includes:

GRADE 10

- ✓ Organizing the Interquest online assessment for all grade 10 students in Semester 1. InterQuest is an important assessment that will assist students with their IB course selection for Grade 11. It is a very useful assessment which will help students learn more about themselves, their strengths, abilities, and explore careers that they had not thought about in the past based on their results.
- ✓ Meeting with all grade 10 students individually, to assist them with their IB course selection for Grade 11.
- ✓ Implementing a three-day work experience program in Semester 2 where Grade 10 students will experience the professional world by shadowing individuals in companies in Singapore. This will give Grade 10 students the opportunity to consider their strengths and interests. This will be preceded with a program where Grade 10 students will learn about resume writing, communication skills, interviewing and identify at least three potential careers.

GRADE 11

- ✓ A general University evening in Semester 1 organized for grade 11 students and their parents detailing all aspects of the university application process.
- ✓ Initial individual student consultations in Semester 2 of Grade 11 followed by meetings with both students and parents in Grade 11 and throughout Grade 12.
- ✓ Workshops in semester 2 of grade 11 on researching universities/colleges, preparing applications and essays.
- ✓ Helping students create an initial balanced list of colleges/universities based on their interests, abilities and needs.

GRADE 11 TIMELINE

September 14 2017-University Night for grade 11 parents and students.

December 2017 -University Advisor will meet individually with all grade 11 students to discuss university options. Parents are welcome to sit in on these meetings.

December 2017/January 2018-Grade 11 students who are applying to the United States should schedule dates to take the [SAT](#) or [ACT](#). If students are planning to apply early decision to the United States, make sure that you take the SAT or ACT once again in June 2017. English B students who need to take the [IELTS](#) or the [TOEFL](#) could complete the same at the earliest.

April 30, 2018-A presentation will be held at the library for all Grade 11, US applicants on logging in to the Common Application and on applying to the United States.

May 25, 2018- Last day to submit teacher reference request forms to the teachers.

May 29, 2018-A presentation will be held in the library for grade 11, UK applicants on how to apply to the UK.

GRADE 12

- ✓ Individual meetings with Grade 12 students in Semester 1 in order to review the student's list of colleges and universities based on the student's interests, academic abilities and other factors relevant to the student.
- ✓ Assistance and guidance in the preparation of applications including personal statements, essays, mock interviews and contact with university representatives.
- ✓ Counselor/referee letters of recommendation that strongly support the student's application to appropriate universities.
- ✓ Hosting several university representatives at ISS, so that students can learn more about universities and colleges that they are interested in.
- ✓ Offering continual support to students applying to National Service or taking a Gap Year;
- ✓ Advising students and parents regarding financial aid and merit based scholarships;

TIMELINE

August 28- Submit the first draft of Personal statement and/or College essay to university advisor.

September 8- For Cambridge-Pay and send application;

September 22-Oxford/medicine/vet/dentistry-Pay and send application.

September 25- last date to notify university advisor of Early Decision or Early Application in the US;

November 25-Pay and send all UK applications to referee;

December 10-Submit HK applications to universities online;

January 5-Submit Canadian applications to universities online;

January 20-submit Singapore applications to each university online;

Submit all other applications six weeks prior to the external deadlines.

COLLEGE APPLICATION MATERIAL SUBMISSION CHART

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS	RESPONSIBLE PARTY	HOW/WHEN
Test-Scores (SAT/ACT/TOEFL/IELTS)	Student	Send after last test taken via: www.collegeboard.com www.actstudent.org
Online application-UK-UCAS	University Advisor	Once the student makes the payment on UCAS the university advisor will fill in predicted grades and reference and send the application via UCAS
Online application-US, Japan, Canada, Europe Singapore, Australia	Student	Submit electronically by deadline
Essay, Supplemental forms and letters	Student	Submit electronically or mail by deadline
ISS School transcript	University advisor	Sent electronically by deadline
School Profile	University Advisor	Sent electronically with transcript by deadline
Mid-Year Report	University Advisor	Sent once Semester 2 results are available
University Advisor/College counselor letter of recommendation	University Advisor	Sent electronically by deadline
Teacher letter of recommendation	Teacher	Teacher sends the letter either directly to college or to the university advisor as required depending upon the requirement of the colleges.

All about applying to Colleges/Universities

COLLEGE PREPARATION CHECKLIST

- ___ I have reviewed the college website carefully;
- ___ I have visited the campus/met with the admissions representative;
- ___ I have checked that the college offers the programs I am interested in;
- ___ I have taken all required standardised tests (SAT, SAT Subject tests, ACT, TOEFL, IELTS);
- ___ I am ready to send my test scores to all of the colleges where they are required;
- ___ I have included this college on my Common app list;
- ___ I have met with my university advisor;
- ___ I have completed my essays;
- ___ I have completed my colleges supplemental application;
- ___ I have discussed financial requirements of the colleges that I am applying to

There are multiple ways in which you can gather information about colleges and determine if they suit your needs.

- ✓ Discussion with your university Advisor;
- ✓ General college guidebooks. These are available at ISS library;
- ✓ General college websites;
- ✓ College visits;
- ✓ Meetings with admission representatives who visit ISS;
- ✓ Discussions with college students, alumni, faculty and administrators;

Words of wisdom from the University advising Office:

Words of Wisdom from the College Office

- ✓ Be visible in the University Advising office and check your email/Managebac daily;
- ✓ Read and follow the College handbook;
- ✓ Keep electronic copies of everything (passwords, essays, forms, letters etc);
- ✓ While registering for the SAT/SAT subject tests/ACT/IELTS/TOEFL use your name as mentioned in your

passport;

- ✓ The school code is 687212. Put this number on your test registration forms.
- ✓ If you have a special talent – music, drama, athletics – pursue that interest with each college. This is not the time to be modest. If the admission committee doesn't know about your talent, they can't possibly react to it.
- ✓ Plan your college visits well in advance if possible. Typically you can register for on-campus tours/information sessions/interviews online. (If a college offers interviews the slots tend to fill up, so schedule ahead.)
- ✓ Register for SAT Reasoning Tests/SAT Subject Tests/ACT Tests early to ensure your desired test center.
- ✓ Identify those colleges (particularly public institutions) that have specific testing and course requirements early in the process.

THE COLLEGE SEARCH-GETTING STARTED

You are the one who will be going to college-not your parents, your teachers, your neighbors or anyone else. **Take ownership of the process and engage in it.** Get started by asking yourself some honest questions about what your values, talents, needs and goals are. Some things that you may want to ask yourself:

- ✓ What values are most important to me?
- ✓ What kind of person do I want to become?
- ✓ What am I good at? In what areas would I like to improve?
- ✓ What are my academic interests? When I have time, what do I pursue on my own?
- ✓ What sort of learning environment is best for me? Do I like to speak up in class, or do I prefer anonymity in the classroom?
- ✓ How hard am I willing to work in college? How much effort am I able to put into fulfilling my goals?
- ✓ What sort of social environment makes me happy? What sort of environment brings out the best in me as a person?
- ✓ What do I wish I had done differently during high school?

Answers to these important questions will help you picture a college environment that might be best for you.

Give yourself plenty of time to work on your essays and short answers. Adhere to deadlines, follow instructions and make the most of the available resources. Efficiently managing the paperwork involved in

your application are powerful acts of self-advocacy. Give the process the time and attention that it deserves.

Some other factors to consider while choosing a college

Geographic Location

Geographic location: You may well have more freedom now than you ever will have at any time in your life. Consider the opportunity of living in another part of the country - there are great colleges everywhere! Also, since colleges are interested in maintaining geographic diversity, you may have an advantage at colleges further away from home.

City vs. suburb vs. country: Are you a city girl or country girl- or somewhere in between? How much do you make use of a city? Do you spend your free time walking in the woods? Do you want to try for both? Will the noise and excitement of a city be stimulating or wearing?

College Character

The following questions might help you determine if a college is the right "fit" for you:

- ✓ How big is it? Small (<2,500), medium (2,500 - 8,000), large (>8,000)?
- ✓ Co-ed or all-women's? Religious affiliation or non-sectarian?
- ✓ What is the school's history, and how does that history affect its mission today?
- ✓ What does the college look like? What does it "feel" like? Can you see yourself in these surroundings for four years?
- ✓ What is the campus atmosphere? Intellectual? Collegiate? "Preppy"? Non-conformist?
- ✓ Anti-intellectual? Socially concerned? Experimental? Artistic?

Academic Program

- ✓ What are the strongest programs and departments?
- ✓ What are the graduation requirements in terms of number of courses and specific required courses?
- ✓ What degrees are offered? 5

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- ✓ Does every department offer a major? Do they offer liberal arts, professional technical degree programs, or both? Do they offer programs such as engineering, architecture, nursing, or physical therapy?
- ✓ If it is a university, what colleges does it contain? Can a student change from one program to another?
- ✓ Are there special academic programs? Junior year abroad? Exchange programs? Research opportunities? Interim intensive courses?
- ✓ If the school offers a joint program, is there inter-campus transportation available so that you can take the courses you want on another campus?
- ✓ Is the college calendar run by semester? Trimester? Quarter? 4-1-4 (four courses in the fall, one during the month of January, four more in the spring)? When do vacations fall?
- ✓ What is the standard academic load? What are the maximum and minimum loads?
- ✓ What courses are open to freshmen? Are there freshman seminars? What courses/disciplines are required?
- ✓ What does the college consider to be its strengths? What does the college consider to be its weaknesses?
- ✓ Is there cross-registration with other area colleges? (e.g., the Five colleges in Western Massachusetts, the Claremont Colleges in California).
- ✓ What is the academic advising system like?

Resources and Services

- ✓ What are the library facilities like? Is the main library used for study or socializing? Are there special collections? Do academic departments maintain their own reference libraries?
- ✓ What are the types and availability of residence facilities? What percentages of students live in dormitories? Off-campus? Are first-year students housed together or in mixed-class dorms? Are all the dorms coed? By floor or room? How big are the dorms? What do they look like? Is
- ✓ Is housing guaranteed for freshmen? For all four years? Do you have to deposit by a certain date to be guaranteed housing?
- ✓ What are the dining facilities like? Dining plans? Accommodations for special diets, (i.e. Kosher meals, vegetarian alternatives)? Is there a college nutritionist?
- ✓ What are the health facilities on campus? Medical or dental plans for students? How do current students rate the care they receive?
- ✓ Is there a career resource center? How active is it?

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- ✓ What kinds of entertainment is available on/off campus? Movies? Plays? Concerts? Exhibits? Lectures? Clubs? How often? At what cost?
- ✓ What does the college do to orient its new students? What sort of guidance is available to new students?
- ✓ How safe is the campus?

Admissions

- ✓ What criteria are used for admission?
- ✓ Does the college require the SAT or ACT? Or is the college test-optional or test-flexible? If SAT Subject Tests are required, which ones?
- ✓ How significant are extracurricular activities, rigor of academic program, and essays?
- ✓ Does the college admit by major? How does the admissions competition differ among specific programs or majors?
- ✓ If a public university, what are the criteria for out-of-state students? Do they differ?

Financial Aid

- ✓ Is the Admission process “need blind” or “need aware/need sensitive”?
- ✓ Does the college meet the total demonstrated financial need of all accepted students?
- ✓ What is the standard grant/loan/work balance?
- ✓ Are merit scholarships available?
- ✓ Are student jobs available only to financial aid students or to anyone? What is the pay scale?

Student Body

- ✓ Where does the student body come from? Is there racial, cultural, and socio-economic diversity? Is there genuine institutional support for a diverse student body?
- ✓ What is the ratio of women to men?
- ✓ What percentage actually graduate in four years? Five years? Eventually?
- ✓ What percentage of seniors goes on to graduate school? Medical school? Law school? MBA programs? How are graduates employed?

Faculty

- ✓ What is the student-faculty ratio?
- ✓ Who will be teaching the courses you want to take, teaching assistants or professors?
- ✓ Is there a published student evaluation of courses and professors?

- ✓ Are there advisors and professional counselors available? Are they used?
- ✓ Are the professors accessible? Are they available post office hours?
- ✓ What is the percentage of female professors? Tenured female professors?
- ✓ Is the faculty racially and culturally diverse?

Extracurricular Activities

- ✓ What percentage of the student body is engaged in community service?
- ✓ Is the student body considered to be socially/environmentally/politically conscious? What organizations are the most active?
- ✓ How important are fraternities and sororities? What percentage of the student body joins? What is social life like for those who do not join?
- ✓ Are there adequate athletic facilities? Intramural sports? Intercollegiate teams? What percentages of students play intramural sports?
- ✓ What role do the arts play in campus life? What performing ensembles are offered? Are music lessons offered for credit? What sorts of activities are available outside the classroom? How are the facilities? Are studios/practice rooms/video labs/dark rooms, etc., open to everyone or just to students enrolled in specific courses?

What are Colleges/Universities looking for?

It is natural to wonder what colleges are looking for in their applicants. Credentials drive countries like Australia, Canada, UK, Hong Kong and Singapore. If the students meet the requirements academically then in all likelihood an offer will be made. Admissions are transparent.

On the other hand countries like USA, Japan and parts of Europe rely more on a holistic evaluation process taking into account in factors such as communication skills, perseverance, citizenship, critical thinking, family, etc.

While colleges look at a variety of factors to determine what each applicant might bring to their community, most begin with an examination of the **high school transcript**, the official record of your courses and grades throughout high school. In reviewing your transcript, admissions officers typically ask:

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- What kind of grades has the applicant received over the years?
- Is there a trend (upward, downward, consistent, up and down) to her grades?
- Has she taken advantage of advanced classes? Did she have access to these classes?
- How does her senior year program look? Is she challenging herself during this important year?
- Is she taking the bare minimum requirements, or has she taken more than is required for graduation?
- Does she have a particular academic interest?

In examining your transcript, colleges are hoping to both **understand your academic experience** and **assess your academic potential**.

Along with an examination of your academic program and grades, colleges also examine the results of your standardized testing. Most colleges continue to require the SAT or ACT, and some of the most competitive colleges also require the SAT Subject Tests. The SAT is designed to test your critical thinking skills in both the verbal and quantitative arenas. Some colleges place more emphasis on standardized testing than others, while there are a number of highly selective colleges that are “test optional” or “test flexible.”

[SAT 2017-2018 Testing dates](#)

[ACT 2016-2017 Testing dates](#)

[Difference between the ACT and SAT](#)

Registration dates are several weeks before the tests; you are responsible for meeting all registration deadlines. We suggest that you register for the SAT at www.collegeboard.org and for the ACT at www.act.org. You should be able to access your scores online about 2.5 weeks after the test date.

You are responsible for sending your test scores to the colleges to which you are applying. When you are ready to report your scores for the SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Test/s, or ACT, you should list the colleges to which you want your scores sent. The testing agency will send your scores to a limited number of colleges without any additional charge. There will be a fee for additional colleges

Participation in extracurricular activities can influence admission decisions. While the most important consideration to a college admission officer is, “Can this student be successful academically at our institution?” they are also interested in a rich campus environment for all of their students and therefore look to admit students who bring special talents outside of the classroom.

While colleges are not necessarily looking for a “well-rounded

student,” they are hoping to build a “well-rounded class” with room for the symphony flutist, the field hockey goalie, the community service leader, and the alumni child. Remember: it is the **quality** of the participation in an outside activity, reflecting your **commitment and contributions** that is most important to colleges. Joining every club in sight merely to generate a lengthy list for college applications is counterproductive, but sustained participation in a few activities *is* impressive to colleges.

Letters of Recommendation

The university advising office prepares a letter of recommendation that details your academic and co-curricular strengths, and attempts to convey the essence of who you are as a student and a member of ISS community.

Keeping this in mind, you will ask two teachers to prepare letters of recommendation on your behalf.

Towards the end of the second semester, the following forms will be given to you:

- ✓ Brag Sheet-This is an opportunity for you to talk about your accomplishments both inside and outside the classroom;
- ✓ Teacher recommendation form-You will ask two teachers for a recommendation, and in order to do that you would be required to fill out this form to explain what your contributions in the subject have been and why the particular teacher should write you a letter of recommendation.
- ✓ Parent form-This is a form that is required to be filled out by parents to elaborate on achievements and accomplishments of their children.

Once all these forms are completed and submitted to the university advisor, the forms will be reviewed and shared with the teachers who will then write letters of recommendations for students in the first semester of grade 12.

The following guidelines have been established regarding teacher letters of recommendation for college applications:

- ✓ In semester two of grade 11, you will approach two teachers and request them for a letter of recommendation. The teacher has the right to refuse to write a letter of recommendation if he/she thinks the students has not made significant contributions to his/her class.
- ✓ Once the teachers have agreed to write you a letter of recommendation, the student can proceed with filling out the brag sheet, teacher recommendation form and getting parents to fill out the parent form.
- ✓ In some cases you may want to round out your application or highlight parts of your extracurricular life by submitting letters of recommendation from other faculty (athletics/music etc.)

- ✓ You must give your teachers enough notice so they have enough time to prepare your letters.
- ✓ If the recommending teacher requests anything additional, you should supply that information either in writing or through an informal interview or discussion.
- ✓ Teachers will use their own procedures for completing the recommendation forms. Teachers will submit the letters of recommendation to University advisor. The College Office will communicate with all teachers to keep them informed of deadlines you provide to us.
- ✓ Letters of recommendation written by faculty members or other school personnel are considered CONFIDENTIAL and will not be given to you or your parents.
- ✓ Each teacher will keep a copy of the letter of recommendation.
- ✓ You should follow up with a thank you, *in writing*; in grateful acknowledgement of the hours that faculty spend writing recommendations.

College Essays (US)

The college essay and the short answer section of the college application is an aspect over which the student has a great deal of control and it provides an opportunity to the student to come alive to the admissions committee.

Use the College Essay:

- ✓ To show the admission committee something they could not know based on the rest of your application
- ✓ To illustrate your uniqueness as a thinking, motivated, curious, committed, or creative person
- ✓ To enable the reader to evaluate your writing and thinking;
- ✓ To help the reader get to know you - using the essay as a window to your personality, values and goals;
- ✓ To help the reader create a full (and hopefully memorable) picture of you.

Guidelines

- ✓ Read the essay question carefully and be sure to answer the question asked
- ✓ Conform to guidelines relative to length; if a length limitation is not provided, one page single-spaced is usually an appropriate length;
- ✓ Use your own voice - informal, conversational - not stilted;
- ✓ Avoid humorous essays unless you are good at them, but freely use humor and wit if you can achieve the right tone

- ✓ Correct spelling mistakes and errors in standard usage. Proofread, and do not rely only on your computer's "spell check" feature!
- ✓ Give fresh life to subjects like travel, Outward Bound, volunteer work, or personal topics – all need an interesting perspective; any topic can work if approached in an original way.
- ✓ Don't repeat lists of activities or duplicate your resume!
- ✓ Don't let mom or dad or anyone else write the essay!
- ✓ Accentuate the positive – even in a painful experience; show triumph over struggle or learning from mistakes
- ✓ Generate a clear direction and stimulate reader interest in the introductory paragraph
- ✓ Remember that the first few sentences are critical and must engage the reader
- ✓ Avoid the five-paragraph essay as too mechanical; let your essay be purpose-driven
- ✓ Create a positive impact in your conclusion
- ✓ Treat every essay question, including the short answer questions, seriously, and give them your full, reflective response.

How to Write

- ✓ Decide what your message is first
- ✓ Spend as much time thinking as you do writing
- ✓ Use a technique that works for you, like brainstorming or free writing before the first draft – afterward, revise;
- ✓ If you are stuck, have a brainstorming session with someone close to you;
- ✓ If you write about an activity or an experience, focus not on how good you are or what you have accomplished, but what it means to you;
- ✓ Don't ask yourself or anyone else, "What should I write about?" The appropriate question is, "What should I tell them about myself?"
- ✓ Test the "success" of your essay by asking someone to read it; do not ask, "Do you like it?" but rather, "What do you think it says about me?"
- ✓ Write your essay over time, so that you have the opportunity for considerable feedback and multiple revisions
- ✓ Ask yourself, "If college deans were to place me with roommates based on this essay, would they be able to choose compatible people? Would it give them something to go on?"
- ✓ Ask yourself, "Is this a piece of self-advocacy that also reveals something true and authentic about me?"

Personal Statement UK

Three factors go into making an offer in the UK:

- ✓ Grades
- ✓ References
- ✓ Personal statement

The personal statement is an opportunity to add voice to your application and to tell universities why they should choose you. It is an opportunity to tell universities as to why you want to study this course. Very often especially in the case of courses like law and medicine the personal statement forms the basis of interview questions and hence it is often read by people who are experts in the field and who are looking for students as enthusiastic as themselves in the course of study.

What should go into your Personal statement:

- ✓ Why are you applying to this course;
- ✓ Why are you interested in the subject and what ignited your interest;
- ✓ Your current or previous studies-How your HL subjects support your interest in a particular course;
- ✓ Personal skills;
- ✓ Work Experience;
- ✓ Extracurricular activities;
- ✓ Achievements;
- ✓ Hobbies and Interests;
- ✓ Personal experience;
- ✓ Career Plans;
- ✓

Some Tips while writing a Personal Statement

- ✓ Do create a list or mind map of ideas before your first draft;
- ✓ Do check university websites and entry profiles for your chosen courses; they usually tell you the criteria and qualities that they want their students to demonstrate
- ✓ Do write in your own voice using the first person ("I")
- ✓ Do expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy;
- ✓ Do ask people you trust for their feedback;
- ✓ Do proofread, proofread; proofread
- ✓ Do write your own personal statement.

Some Technicalities

- ✓ 47 lines of text; including blank lines or 4000 characters whichever comes first;
- ✓ Use paragraphing;
- ✓ No options for bold, italics or underlining;
- ✓ No spellcheck capacity;
- ✓ Prepare in word, proofread (again) and copy and paste.

Some possible reasons for Rejection

- ✓ No evidence of passion or enthusiasm for the subject;
- ✓ Spelling mistakes;
- ✓ Repetition of words e.g. interesting/interested;
- ✓ Poor structure-no flow, sentences too long etc.;
- ✓ No evidence of interest outside the school curriculum;
- ✓ Lack of focus; broad statements, no specifics
- ✓ Too much emphasis on hobbies with no links to course.

A quote from an Exeter Admissions Tutor:

“60% of the Personal statements I read start with, ‘ever since the age of 5 I have been passionate about X...’ It’s probably true, but if you want to stand out, say something else”.

Checklist for Students

- ✓ Meet with the University Advisor regularly;
- ✓ Attend university visits and meet with university representatives;
- ✓ Take the SAT/ACT in the December/January of grade 11
- ✓ Begin to gather information about colleges. Read your copy of The Fiske Guide to Colleges and The Insider’s Guide to the Colleges. Search for college information on [College Board](#) and [Unigo](#). Access individual college websites for specific information.
- ✓ Ask relevant teachers for recommendations and fill out the required documentation;

Good luck!!

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