

**Educating to  
Make a Difference**



# **University Advising Handbook 2024-2026**

Revised August 2024



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

ISS International School 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 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.

## 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 Unifrog platform for Grade 10 students who would like to learn more about themselves, their strengths, abilities, and to 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 and High School Diploma course selection for Grade 11.

### Grade 11

- Hosting a university information evening in conjunction with program heads in Semester 1 for Grade 11 students and their parents detailing all aspects of the university application process and pathways.
- Meeting Grade 11 students in Semester 2.

- Hosting workshops and group sessions for Grade 11 students in HSD Portfolio class and IBDP Academic Skills in Semester 2 to discuss application processes to different destinations, how to research universities/colleges, and start preparing applications and essays.
- Guiding students to create an initial balanced list of universities or other institutions based on their interests, abilities and needs.

## **Grade 12**

- Individual meetings with Grade 12 students in Semester 1 in order to review the student's list of institutions based on the student's interests, academic abilities, submission deadlines, and other factors relevant to the student.
- Guidance on the preparation of university applications including personal statements, essays, mock interviews and contact with admissions departments and possibly university representatives if necessary.
- Teacher/Counsellor referee letters of recommendation that strongly support the student's application to appropriate universities.
- Hosting university representatives at ISS when possible, 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;

# Grade 11 / 12 Timeline (Class of 2025)

September 2024	Introduction to higher education session for Grade 11 parents and students online.
December 2024 – January 2025	Grade 11 students who are applying to the United States should schedule dates to take the <u>SAT</u> or <u>ACT</u> . If students are planning to apply for early decision to the United States, make sure that you take the SAT or ACT again in June 2022. English B students who need to take the <u>IELTS</u> or the <u>TOEFL</u> could complete the same at the earliest.
January 2025	University Advisor will begin to meet individually with all Grade 11 students to discuss options for higher education.
April, 2025	Students begin the process for requesting of teacher references
May, 2025	Common Application Presentation-Applying to the United States and Common application essay
May, 2025	Last date to submit teacher reference request forms to leaving teachers
May, 2025	Last date to submit teacher reference request and supporting documents for all teachers
June, 2025	Information about applying to the UK & writing a Personal Statement (UK)
SUMMER BREAK	Work on Essays and Personal Statements Work Experience/Internship if required Standardized Testing - SAT/ACT/IELTS/TOEFL Continue with your Research!
September 2025	Submit the first draft of Personal statement and/or College essay to University Advisor.
10 September 2025	Cambridge applications due on UCAS-pay and send to referee
10 September 2025	Early Decision, Early Action and Priority Action (US Applications) commitment decisions are due. Inform your advisor of Early Decision choice; sign and have your parent to sign the Early Decision Agreement in Common application

20 September 2025	Oxford/Medicine/Vet/Dentistry applications due on UCAS- pay and send to the referee.
30 September 2025	Register and complete all sections of Common Application. Notify University Advisor if you are applying early decision to the US
November 2025	Student to pay and send all other UK applications to the referee.
December 2025	Submit Hong Kong applications to universities online.
December 2025	Submit Canadian applications to universities online, and provide the student application number to the University Advisor.  Submit all remaining US applications prior to external deadline
January 2026	Submit Singapore applications to universities online and provide a checklist of required supporting documents to University Advisor.  Check any remaining UCAS applications are completed

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

# College Application Material Submission Chart

Application Requirements	Responsible Party	How and When?
<b>Test-Scores (SAT, ACT, TOEFL, IELTS)</b>	Student	Student sends results after the last test taken via: <a href="http://www.collegeboard.com">www.collegeboard.com</a> Please consult the advisor for information regarding each test.
<b>Online Application for UCAS</b>	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.
<b>Online Application for US, Japan, Canada, Europe Singapore, Australia</b>	Student	Submit electronically by deadline.
<b>Essay, Supplemental Forms and Letters</b>	Student	Submit electronically or mail by deadline.
<b>ISS School transcript</b>	University Advisor	Sent electronically by deadline.
<b>School Profile</b>	University Advisor	Sent electronically with transcript by deadline.
<b>Mid-Year Report</b>	University Advisor	Sent once Semester 2 results are available.
<b>University Advisor/College counselor letter of recommendation</b>	University Advisor	Sent electronically by deadline.
<b>Letter of Recommendation from teacher</b>	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 Universities/Other Institutions

There are multiple ways in which you can gather information and determine whether an institution will suit your needs.

- Discussion with your University Advisor;
- General university guidebooks. These are available at ISS library;
- General college websites;
- College/University visits;
- Meetings with admission representatives who may visit ISS or when attending the Lion City Fair or other university fairs in Singapore at Suntec etc;
- Discussions with college students, alumni, faculty and administrators;
- Discussions with teachers about their college experience

## Words of Wisdom from the University Advising Office:

- Be visible in the University Advising office and check your email/Managebac and GoogleClassroom daily;
- Read and follow the University Advising 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;
- Register for SAT Reasoning Tests/SAT Subject Tests/ACT Tests early to ensure your desired test centre.
- 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.)
- Identify those colleges (particularly public institutions) that have specific testing and course requirements early in the process.

# How to Get Started

**You** are the one who will be taking the next step and moving on to higher education; not your parents, your teachers, your neighbours 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 or university 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.
- Keep appointments and label/star communicates from the University Advisor particularly when Google Forms are requested to be filled in.

# Other Factors to Consider When Choosing an Institution

## 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 country - there are great universities, polytechnics and colleges everywhere! You will need to consider where you parents can afford and where they are comfortable sending you.

City vs. Suburb vs. Country: Are you a city person or country person- 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 stressful? What are the limitations set by family and financial circumstances and getting 'value for money'?

## University or Institution 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?
- 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?
- What are the strongest programmes and departments?
- What are the graduation requirements in terms of number of courses and specific required courses?
- Are there special academic programmes? Junior year abroad? Exchange programmes? Research opportunities?

- If the school offers a joint programme, is intercampus transportation available so that you can take the courses you want on another campus?
- 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 housing guaranteed for first year students?? For all four years? Do you have to deposit by a certain date to be guaranteed housing?
- What are the dining facilities like? 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 centre? How active is it?
- What kinds of entertainment is available on or off campus? Movies? Plays? Concerts? How often? At what cost?
- What does the college do to orient new students? What sort of guidance is available for 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 programmes, and essays?
- Does the college admit by major? How does the admissions competition differ among specific programmes or majors?

## **Financial Aid**

- 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 programmes? How are graduates employed?

## **Faculty**

- What is the student-faculty ratio?
- Are there advisors and professional counsellors available?
- Are the professors accessible? Are they available after office hours?
- What is the percentage of female professors?
- Is the faculty racially and culturally diverse?
- Who will be teaching the courses you want to take, teaching assistants or professors?
- Is there a published student evaluation of courses and professors?

## **Extracurricular Activities**

- What percentage of the student body is engaged in community service?
- Is the student body considered to be socialy / environmentally / politically conscious? What organizations are the most active?
- 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 and 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 the USA, Japan and parts of Europe rely more on a holistic evaluation process taking into account 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:

- 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 programme 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?
- Has she shown progress in a particular subject and/or English level?

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 programme 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 in the United States that are “test optional” or “test flexible.”

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 [Collegeboard](https://www.collegeboard.org) and for the ACT at [www.act.org](https://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. A college admissions officer looks to admit students who bring special talents outside of the classroom.

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 not productive, 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 need to 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 via Google Classroom, 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 a letter of recommendation from them. The teacher has the right to refuse to write a letter of recommendation if he/she thinks the student 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 (at least two weeks' 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 the 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, or any agents.**
- 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 (USA and Canada)

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 humour 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 such as an agent 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?".
- Ask yourself, "Will my university advisor believe my writing and will they expect proof of awards and experiences etc?".

# Personal Statement (United Kingdom)

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 experts in the field are 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 and/or EE, IA or HSD Capstone Project support your interest in a particular course;
- Personal skills;
- Work Experience;
- Extracurricular activities;
- Achievements;
- Hobbies and Interests;
- Personal experience;
- Progress and growth if possible
- Career Plans;

### **Tips While Writing a Personal Statement:**

- Create a list or mind map of ideas before your first draft;
- 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
- Write in your own voice using the first person ('I')
- Expect to produce several drafts before being totally happy;
- Ask people you trust for their feedback;
- Proofread, proofread, proofread
- 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.

“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”.  
– **From An Exeter Admissions Tutor**

### **Checklist For Students:**

- Meet with the University Advisor regularly;
- Attend university visits in school, in partner schools such as Tanglin Trust (the Lion City Fair), and in Singapore organized by agencies, and meet with university representatives;
- Take the SAT/ACT in December/January of grade 11.
- Begin to gather information about colleges. Read your own copy of The Fiske Guide to Colleges and The Insider’s Guide to the Colleges. Search for college information on [College Board](#) and [Unigo](#) and [Unifrog](#). Access individual college websites for specific information.
- Ask relevant teachers for recommendations and fill out the required documentation.