

# IBSCA HEI Advisors' Conference

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Workshop Two: Applying to University in the USA

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# US: the main differences

- \* No central clearing house with a universally accepted application form
- \* Mixture of private and state colleges and universities
- \* Admission not conditional on final exam results but on holistically judged combination of qualities and qualifications
- \* Admission decisions announced before exams taken
- \* Gathered field approach at most colleges and universities
- \* Full time professional admissions staff
- \* No need to declare major in advance
- \* Medicine, veterinary, law are graduate studies only
- \* Liberal arts approach to disciplines and subjects

# The main challenges for university guidance counsellors..

- \* Parental obsession with the Ivy League
- \* Costs and financial aid
- \* SATs
- \* Coaching teachers to write appropriate recommendations
- \* How many applications to allow
- \* Organising formative assessment into transcripts, GPAs, ranking

# The IB and US Colleges and Universities: good news!

- \* The IB is considered the best academic programme in the world by the top US universities and colleges
- \* Recognition is universal and credits are generous
- \* Admission is judged holistically and not on raw scores (however the degree of difficulty of the school course being taken is considered) – all aspects of an admission folder, including CAS, are read and considered by the admissions team in committee. Outcome depends on “the story”
- \* There are no conditional offers: candidates receive an admit or deny regardless of exam results
- \* International students are “exotic” in varying degrees, and the year is “composed” to include diversity inside and outside the US

# For the grade-obsessed..

(from my experience, but don't try to hold them to it...)

## **Highly Competitive Universities and Colleges**

e.g. Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Yale, Columbia, Brown, Cornell,  
Chicago, UPenn, Washington in St Louis, Amherst, Williams

**Predicted IB Score of 40+ (IB is highly respected)**

**SAT Reasoning Score of 2000+ and Subject Tests**

**Extracurricular prowess**

**A four year transcript of high or climbing grades**

**Outstanding teacher recommendations**

**A memorable interview and compelling story**

# Still grade-obsessed?

## **Top 40 Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities**

e.g. Wesleyan, Middlebury, Macalester, Wellesley, Vanderbilt, Emory, Carnegie Mellon, Michigan, NYU

**Predicted IB Score of 38+**

**SAT Reasoning Score of 1850+**

**Extracurricular prowess**

**A four year transcript of high or climbing grades**

**Excellent teacher recommendations**

**A memorable interview and compelling story**

See <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/>

**But: lowest successful Harvard prediction/Diploma score in my experience was 38/35**

# What does an application comprise?

- \* **An online application form (usually the Common App)**
- \* **Two teacher recommendations**
- \* **A High School Reference**
- \* **A Transcript of Grades**
- \* **An interview record (optional but varies)**
- \* **Standardised Test Scores**
- \* **Supporting materials (optional)**

# The Common Application Form

- \* Used by most colleges
- \* Downloadable at <https://www.commonapp.org/CommonApp/default.aspx> from July 1st
- \* Other colleges have their own application forms on their websites, normally [www.xxx.edu](http://www.xxx.edu)
- \* Many colleges have downloadable supplements with particular tasks
- \* Two parts, one for the student and one for you



# Two teacher recommendations

- \* Helps if from different academic viewpoints
- \* Need to reflect classroom relationship, prowess in subject and other aspects of candidate's contribution e.g. in co-curriculum
- \* Anecdotes are fine! Make it personal
- \* No need to adopt American register, can be informal
- \* Written for full time professionals, not academics

# The High School Reference

- \* Needs to be an overview of all subjects
- \* Adapted UCAS reference will do but no word limit, and does not need to be geared to a particular degree
- \* No need to adjust for American register
- \* Remember admissions decisions are holistic
- \* US admissions value a personal relationship with you so it's okay to be relatively informal

# A Transcript of Grades

- \* Grades in all subjects for four years prior to final school exams
- \* Needs to show subjects studied and grades with an explanation of the grading system. Adapt whatever formative assessment system you use (such as termly grades) and explain on the back. Don't feel pressure to rank or calculate GPA unless an American school. If a sixth form get previous two years from former school
- \* Public exam results included
- \* Progression is as important as level

# An interview record

- \* Ivies and high status universities may send representatives for information giving only and will arrange evaluative interviews with trained alumni
- \* Smaller college admission staff may visit schools to undertake evaluative interview.
- \* Can be done on visiting US in the summer
- \* No hidden tests
- \* Student-centred, friendly, open-ended questions

# Standardised Test Scores

## **SATs**

Never meant for international students

- \* Speak well for candidate if good
- \* Do not eliminate candidate if poor
- \* 2 or 3 SAT Subject Tests required by top colleges
- \* Not required by all colleges - check
- \* Can do language test even if native speaker
- \* Can do both Maths tests
- \* Find your nearest centre on [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)

## **TOEFL**

– refer to institution website

# Overview: the reasoning test

- \* In three parts: Critical Reading, Math and Writing, all scored 200-800. Test is in 10 sections.
- \* Takes nearly 5 hours to sit, from 0830 to 1330 on Saturdays on 6 occasions: October, November, December, January, May and June

For dates see <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-international-dates>

- \* Costs around \$80, results published 4 weeks after test
- \* CR and Maths largely MCQs but Writing is an essay
- \* Preparation books and Courses widely available
- \* Note: the IB Diploma speaks louder than SATs!  
Point this out to students and parents

# Overview: Subject Tests

- \* One hour tests including two in Maths, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, US and World History, Literature and nine languages: Chinese\*, French\*, German\*, Spanish\*, Italian, Latin, Japanese\*, Korean\*, Hebrew (\* November listening tests)
  - \* Scored from 200 to 800
  - \* Costs around \$100 for three typical subjects
- For detailed fees see <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-fees>
- \* Preparation books and courses widely available
  - \* Required by prestigious universities only

# SATs: General

- \* Should be taken late in junior/early in senior year. January scores may not reach colleges in time
  - \* Reasonable overlap with IB and A Level but History and Literature content somewhat American
  - \* Test centres: England 26, Scotland 4, Wales 1
- To search for nearest centre see <http://sat.collegeboard.org/register/sat-code-search>
- \* Tests can be repeated and scores released selectively
  - \* Give guidance on when to register (deadlines are a month ahead), how to complete the forms and when to release scores to chosen colleges



# Supporting Materials

- \* Candidates are welcome to include them by mail or electronically
- \* Typically, a music recording, a piece of writing
- \* Sporting achievements appropriately recorded
- \* Artistic endeavour

# Applying Early

- \* Apply by November 1<sup>st</sup>
- \* Outcome by January 1<sup>st</sup> –Admit, Defer, Reject
- \* Early Decision is binding – if admitted all other applications must be withdrawn
- \* Early Action is generally not binding e.g. Stanford
- \* Harvard and Princeton abandoned it 2007-2011
- \* Most others have Early Decision or Rolling Admission

# Advising on Early Application

- \* Generally **no**, in my view, unless
  - \* Parents are American and went to the university (single or double legacy)
  - \* Financial aid is not needed (aid is a lower priority for international students at need-aware colleges).  
Candidate could be locked in with poor aid
  - \* The candidate has visited and is not applying “blind” and is set on one university above all others

# Applying early: further information

- \* <http://talk.collegeconfidential.com/college-search-selection/354075-list-colleges-early-action-early-decision-rolling-admissions.html>
- \* <http://www.collegeboard.com/parents/apply/college-applications/21342.html>
- \* <http://www.admissionsconsultants.com/college/earlydecision.asp>

**Note: Do not be deceived by the figures: studies showing a high proportion of candidates admitted ED at top universities do not separate international students. It does not mean it is easier to get in, though many private consultants would disagree.**

# Timeline for IB Students (i)

## **Junior Year**

- \* Do SAT reasoning test in January or May
- \* Decide whether to do Early Application or not
- \* Fulbright and other events (Sept 27-28 2013, Kensington Town Hall)
- \* Make contact with colleges to see if events are being held in Britain

## **Summer Holidays**

- \* Visit some colleges if you can. Choose 5 or 6

# Timeline for IB students (ii)

- \* If required, repeat SAT Reasoning and take Subject Tests (listening = November only)
- \* Check family financial issues
- \* Attend a Fulbright Fair or equivalent
- \* Write Common App Essays
- \* Choose teachers for Recommendations
- \* Have your school prepare a Transcript and High School Reference

# Timeline for IB students (iii)

## **Senior Year – Autumn Term – 2**

- \* Complete Common App and supplementary materials by 1/11 or 31/12
- \* Family to complete International Student Financial Aid Form if aid is needed by 31/12
- \* Complete any merit scholarship applications by deadlines
- \* Attend college information giving/evaluative interviews if available

# Timeline for IB students (iv)

## Senior Year - Spring and Summer Terms

- \* Release SAT scores to chosen colleges (Jan)
- \* Early application outcomes: if successful, withdraw all other applications (Jan-Feb)
- \* Regular applications: wait till all respond (March)
- \* Accept and pay deposit for chosen college and withdraw from all others (April)
- \* Do not slack off!!
- \* Seek Visa and pay SEVIS fee (**Early** summer)



# Types of US University

..and how to help students choose



# Applying to US Universities

## Overview

The words college, school and university are used interchangeably, but there are

- \* Ivy League Universities
- \* Liberal Arts Colleges
- \* Big and Powerful Non-Ivy League Universities
- \* State Universities
- \* Women-only Colleges
- \* Others e.g. St Johns, College of the Atlantic, Deep Springs College...

# Ivy League Universities

- \* Only 8: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Cornell, UPenn, Dartmouth, Columbia
- \* Quite small and very competitive entry
- \* International reputation based on graduate schools
- \* Quite traditional
- \* Generous aid packages
- \* Some urban, some remote
- \* Full range of disciplines
- \* Some liberal arts approach, e.g. Harvard
- \* All East Coast
- \* Teaching variable

# Liberal Arts Colleges

e.g. Swarthmore, Amherst, Williams, Pomona, Macalester, Hamilton, Colby, Middlebury etc

- \* Most natural for IB graduates
- \* Small – 1200-2000 students
- \* No graduate study
- \* Professors teach undergraduates (well)
- \* Often well endowed
- \* Balanced programmes
- \* Major declared after sophomore year
- \* Little known outside US
- \* Some are women-only colleges e.g. Mount Holyoke, Smith, Bryn Mawr, Wellesley..
- \* Normally about 5% international students
- \* Often remote but beautiful campuses
- \* Good student support services
- \* Some strong traditions, e.g. fraternities, honor codes
- \* Many deans visit Europe
- \* Room and time to adjust your programme
- \* Not much applied science

# Big and Powerful Non-Ivy Universities

- \* Examples: Stanford, MIT, Caltech, Chicago, Washington in St Louis, Northwestern, Duke
- \* Variable financial aid
- \* Will not always visit Europe
- \* Complete range of majors
- \* Very prestigious and as good as Ivies academically
- \* Admissions not always so friendly
- \* Not much financial aid for international students

# State Universities

- \* Examples: Virginia, Florida, Oklahoma
- \* Large proportion of students from in state
- \* Huge (30,000+ in some cases)
- \* Not always famous internationally, but some centres of extreme excellence
- \* Few international students
- \* Much cheaper so scholarships fuller
- \* Some merit scholarships

# Help –too much information!

## Next steps

Read the Fulbright website and use it as a portal to the others, including the Sutton Trust

Look at the Index of Majors to get a sense of which subjects are offered where

- \* Join OACAC or similar and attend a conference
- \* Invite a dean to your school and have dinner..
- \* Look at the US News rankings (carefully)
- \* Email me  
[gareth.rees26@btinternet.com](mailto:gareth.rees26@btinternet.com)

# Sources of Information

- \* The Fulbright Commission [www.fulbright.org.uk](http://www.fulbright.org.uk)
- \* The Sutton Trust [www.suttontrust.com](http://www.suttontrust.com)
- \* The Common App website [www.commonapp.org/](http://www.commonapp.org/)
- \* The College Board Website [www.collegeboard.org/](http://www.collegeboard.org/)
- \* US News & World Report [www.usnews.com/](http://www.usnews.com/)
- \* The Book of Majors 2014, College Board, \$20.18 on Amazon
- \* Fiske Guide to Colleges 2014, \$17.91 on Amazon
- \* Overseas Association for College Admission Counseling, [www.oacac.com](http://www.oacac.com)