

# THE ADMISSIONADO GUIDE

TO ELITE COLLEGE ADMISSIONS





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# 1

## THE COLLEGE LANDSCAPE



## INTRODUCTION

### WHAT IS COLLEGE?

In the game of life, college is your first big-time move. You're signing yourself up for another four years of high-caliber learning, opportunity and achievement. College offers you specialized classes, expert-level engagement with your favorite subjects, a whole new independent approach to being a student... and much more.

Thirty or forty years ago, getting a college degree was optional. Sure, it was helpful for jump-starting a career, but many people still found professional success with just a high school diploma. Those days are loooong gone. Today, a college degree is essential to landing a good job. More people than ever attend a university, which means that employers expect a higher level of education in their employees.

College courses tend to be more challenging than high school courses (more reading, more tests, more papers), but that's a good thing! A college experience pushes you to think about complex subjects in a meaningful way. This prepares you for the problems you will face as an adult – whether in graduate school or the “real world”.

Don't be afraid... college is an amazing time of self-discovery and growth! You'll have a chance to meet interesting people, take classes in topics you never heard of in high school, and attend tons of performances, lectures, and events. Just imagine: you could attend an African dance performance, load up on gadgets and posters at a campus fair, cheer yourself through an animal rights protest, and end up at an evening talk by a leading cancer-research scientist, all on the same day... after a morning of classes. Simply put, it's a chance to figure out who you are, what you really think about the world, and what kind of career you may want to pursue.



# B.

## INSIDE COLLEGE

### YEAR-BY-YEAR BREAKDOWN OF COLLEGE

Just like high school, a college education typically lasts for four years: freshman (1st), sophomore (2nd), junior (3rd), and senior (4th).

Let's suppose your college expects students to take a total of 33 classes over those four years. Just about every college requires students to pick a major – a primary topic of study, like psychology or economics. Different colleges have different rules, but usually, students are required to take 10-15 classes relating to their major. Another 10 classes may be basic requirements (like math and writing). The last 10 or so are elective courses: you have the freedom to choose whichever subjects you want. So how do all these classes – major, requirements, and electives – balance out? And what will your college career actually look like? Let's go through each year, one by one.

#### 1. FRESHMAN YEAR

At first, freshman year is mostly about getting situated – learning the layout of the campus, finding your way around buildings, figuring out which clubs you want to join, and adjusting to college life. For some, this may be your first time away from home. It can be an adjustment. You'll share a room with a stranger. It can be an adjustment. You'll be in charge of your own schedule. It can be – yep – an adjustment. Freshman year is ALL about adjusting. Let it happen. Don't force yourself onto a particular path prematurely... you're liable to handcuff yourself this way.

You'll be meeting people! Every first-year student will be in the same boat as you are, eager to make friends, while upperclassmen are usually more than willing to guide and advise the new kids. And folks, we will say it over and over, THIS is the real education. This is where the value of college is perhaps most relevant. Mingling with, debating with, and being inspired by students from around the world will likely have a more profound impact on your development than academics alone. One of the best ways to meet different types of people in a meaningful way is to participate in a club or organization. Attend club and volunteer fairs, scope out the scene, and take some risks.



## 2. SOPHOMORE YEAR

By sophomore year, most colleges will require students to declare a major. This is the subject that students take the most classes in—it's their academic focus. The trend these days is for students to gravitate not toward the most practical course of study, but rather, the one that interests them the most. In the old days, the idea was to major in something related to your future career: study biological sciences if you want to be a doctor, study history and political science if you want to be a lawyer, study theatre if you want to be... unemployed. (Kidding!) But today, the more rounded thinkers are often the ones that appeal to graduate programs and employers. These days, med schools encourage undergrads to major in everything BUT biology. Sure, a healthy mix of sciences is essential to even consider pursuing the medical path... but if all your classes involve microscopes, you'll miss out on critical ideas and ways of thinking that are highly valued in today's doctors and researchers. So when choosing a major, follow your passions. Major in the subject you're likely to commit to the most – after all, you'll be spending a lot of time with it.

## 3. JUNIOR YEAR

By junior year, you're kinda running the show. The incoming freshmen seem like little babies... all of a sudden, other students are asking you for advice instead of the other way around! At this point, you know the campus like the back of your hand: where to find the most delicious late-night falafel, how to find a free study space during the chaos of final exams, and which social events are worth going to. And by now, you also know exactly what the perfect balance of work and play is – although whether you're achieving it is another matter entirely.

There is still a full academic year between you and your next move after college, when you have to face the question "What do I want to do with my life?" But it may be time for those decisions (grad school? career? fellowship? travel?) to start percolating in a preliminary way, especially as you start to really dig into your major classes. This can help slowly steer you toward relatively concrete plans and ideas, without cramping your ability to take advantage of the freedom college affords you.



#### 4. SENIOR YEAR

Ah, senior year. By this time, students are taking their final courses in their major; leading clubs and committees; squeezing in last-minute classes, shows, and opportunities they know they won't have next year; and preparing for life after college. Most students try to decide what their next step is by the fall of their senior year (if not before) so they're not totally unprepared when graduation rolls around in the spring. However, not everyone has it figured out yet – and that's okay. No matter where you're at, senior year can be a stressful time: Writing senior theses. Preparing resumes for jobs. Filling out grad school applications. Regardless of your chosen path, senior year becomes increasingly bittersweet as you near the end of your college career.

## THE FIVE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES OF COLLEGE

### 1. INDEPENDENCE

For most people, college is the first time they'll be away from their parents. Living on your own poses a few challenges, like doing your own laundry, buying your own groceries, and making sure the dust balls under your bed don't grow to the size of a small dog. On the upside, though, you won't have a curfew, no one will nag you about doing chores, and you can decorate your room however you want.

Most universities require that students live on-campus during their freshman year. According to a 2010 survey, just 20.3% of first-year students lived off campus, either with their parents or in their own apartments.

Basically, living independently is usually some combination of confusion, freedom, terror, vulnerability, and joy. Thankfully, you'll have a roommate to help you navigate all of these pitfalls and questions. (Many people actually end up becoming lifelong friends with their freshman year roommates—given how much time you spend together in a small room, forming a strong bond with your roomie is almost delightfully inevitable.)



## 2. DISCOVERY

Colleges have a rich array of clubs and activities. If you've always wanted to try something, college is THE place to do it. Painting, photography, filmmaking, modern dance, computer programming, knitting, writing for the newspaper, environmental activism – there's usually a wide variety of clubs to choose from. And on this road of self-discovery, you never know which new activity might become a life-long passion.

For example, perhaps you were a champion robotics engineer in high school. That's awesome! Maybe you'll join your college's robotics club, and your team will design a robot that can see through walls.

But maybe one day you'll also see a flyer for the tap dancing club, and you'll think to yourself, "You know what? I've always wanted to try tap dancing!" As it turns out, the club is giving tap lessons that week. You show up, discover that you love it, and ta da – a new hobby is born! (Hopefully your roommate won't mind your late-night tapping sessions...)

So take a look at the clubs your school has to offer that fit with your interests (and potential interests!). Oh, and if the club you're looking for doesn't exist... guess what? You should START it! With some clever advertising and a little effort, you are almost sure to find like-minded folks who will help make your vision into a reality.

## 3. FRIENDSHIPS

By living independently and exploring your interests, you will end up meeting people from a variety of backgrounds. Your roommate might be from Ohio, while your lab partner is from Bangladesh. Perhaps for the first time in your life, you will be working and hanging out with people with a broad range of life experiences, opinions, and cultural sensibilities. Some kids will come from affluent backgrounds while others will have supported themselves since childhood. Some will be Christian and others will be Muslim. There will be free-spirited economics majors, math-loving artists and ambitious philosophers. This melting pot of backgrounds and attitudes is occasionally difficult to navigate, but on the whole it makes for an extremely rich college experience.



While you might not click with everyone, there are bound to be a few people that you totally connect with. And since college is such a formative time, friendships developed in this environment tend to last throughout your life. Your newfound buddies might share your reason for being in college (maybe you both want to be engineers or famous authors), and tend to share your interests, sense of humor, politics, and outlook on life... but don't rule out friendships with people totally different from you, either! Some of the best college relationships come from opposites attracting.

You'll also form professional contacts, whether you realize it or not. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, artists, designers – you're all starting out together. The friends you make now could be your colleagues later on... and amateur partnerships formed in college can turn into successful enterprises after graduation.

Getting to know folks in your field may even lead to a job down the road. You never know – maybe a college friend will find a job with a great company, and you'll be the first person they call when that company is hiring. The "alma mater connection" can be extremely powerful, elevating your chances of being hired by that employer.

But even more importantly, throughout your life, you'll have an instant connection with anyone who went to the same college as you. If you're wearing an Arizona State sweatshirt, and you sit down next to someone who is also wearing an Arizona State sweatshirt, chances are you'll smile at each other and start talking about your college experiences. Why? Because college is a hugely influential, eye-opening time! Having gone through many of the same intense experiences, you and your college's alumni share a unique bond. It's really powerful, and very cool.

#### 4. ACADEMICS

W.B. Yeats says, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." Of course, (finally!) one of the key features of the college experience is academia. College courses are much more intensive than most high school classes, which gives you a chance to truly explore the subjects you think are the most fascinating. You'll have longer reading lists, loads of research and laboratory opportunities, organized discussions with your classmates, and boatloads of essay-writing, which will give you the chance to form your own



ideas and learn to express them clearly—one of the most important skills you can ever develop, no matter where you end up.

You'll also meet college professors who have studied their subjects for decades and are true experts in the fields that interest you. These professors will expose you to new topics and ideas and inspire you to think about the world in unfamiliar ways.

While there are many types of classes, including writing workshops and scientific labs, most of the classes you take will probably involve two main formats: lectures and discussion-based classes. A lecture course generally has more students, anywhere from 20 to 500 or more. The professor stands at the front of the room and – well – lectures for 1-3 hours per class. If students need extra help or want to discuss the issues raised in class, they can attend the professor's office hours: a scheduled time slot when the professor is required to be available for students to come in and talk one-on-one.

Discussion classes, on the other hand, involve much more student participation and are limited to smaller numbers of students (rarely more than 30). Topics and ideas are raised by the professor, and then discussed as a class, with students volunteering their thoughts, conclusions, questions, and critiques. This is where you'll start to really develop your own academic personality.

In either type of class, it's a good idea to get to know your professors. Discuss your papers, ask about research opportunities, share experiences... not only are professors great resources and fascinating to talk with, but they also provide the glowing recommendations that will one day help you get into grad school or land a job.

Most of your classes will revolve around the subject and department of your major, which will also be the focus of your senior thesis should you choose (or be required) to produce one. A thesis is just a big, original research project that you submit before you graduate. For example, if you're a computer programmer, your thesis project might be designing and developing a software program. Alternatively, if you're a biology student, you might research the effect of listening to classical music on lab rats, and then write a 30- to 60-page paper about your findings. Your thesis will probably be your first large, impressive body of original academic work, and an impressive thesis will be immensely helpful if you choose to go on to graduate school.



While the bulk of your academic work is in your major, you'll also be fulfilling your college's basic class requirements and taking electives that stimulate and excite you. The chance to take elective courses is an awesome opportunity that's pretty unique to college. Most employers gravitate towards people who took classes in a wide variety of subjects, and taking unusual courses will expose you to new ideas outside your specialty. For example, maybe your primary focus is computer engineering, but thanks to that food science class you took during your junior year, you'll know the perfect cooking temperature of an egg for the rest of your life!

The point is, exploring a variety of topics will help you lead a richer life after college. Follow your passions, but don't be afraid to dip your toe in something you might not know much about. You never know how or when one random course in college will help you later... or change your whole life path!

## 5. CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Some folks view college as the first step in a very rigid career path. After graduation, they'll either go directly to grad school, or they'll have a job waiting for them. For these students, the majority of their college experience is geared towards starting their career.

For others, however, their careers won't fall into place until much later in life. That's fine! College will still teach them how to think creatively and allow them to develop important relationships that will "pay off" down the line.

Either way, college is for learning, exploration and development. By taking risks, meeting new people, studying, and joining clubs, students become smarter, worldlier, more aware human beings. It doesn't matter (too much) if students are career-oriented or not—college allows everyone to grow in way that will serve them later in life.



## WHY COLLEGE?

### WHY GO TO COLLEGE IN THE US?

Okay, so we've established that college is great. But why come all the way to the United States? Why not stay in your home country, or even home hemisphere?

Here's why:

#### 1. THE BEST UNIVERSITIES IN THE WORLD ARE LOCATED IN THE US

Perhaps you have heard of the Ivy League schools (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and five others), but there are also plenty of other rigorous schools, including Stanford, the University of Chicago, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to name a few. Each of these universities boasts world-class professors, state-of-the-art facilities, and driven, intelligent students who will push you to achieve (and exceed) your potential. We'll go into a lot more detail on this in Chapter 2.

The range of academic experiences available in the US is truly astounding. Whether you want a big campus or a small one, a school in a city or out in the woods, or a college that specializes in your field of interest (engineering, ballet, even underwater basket weaving), there's a perfect school for you. Well, maybe there's not actually a college that specializes in underwater basket weaving, but you get the picture.

#### 2. AMERICAN WAY OF THINKING

In American colleges, a huge emphasis is placed on creative thinking and making original arguments. This makes the American education style different from any other in the world. If you want to learn how to generate innovative ideas, examine problems in original ways, and generally think for yourself, an American university is the place to do it.

Unlike many professors in China and India, American professors will expect you to develop your own ideas in papers and discussions. Sure, you'll use some research that others have done, but you'll be responsible for interpreting that research in your own way. Can you synthesize information? What is your analysis? American professors will want to know! In the US, creating your own



arguments and theories is JUST as important as memorizing pre-existing ones. Sure, you know helium's molecular structure, but can you design a creative experiment based on it?

Fundamentally, the act of making an original argument exercises a different BRAIN MUSCLE than memorization does. This will serve you well in any field you choose to go into. This is one of the main reasons why the American education system enjoys such a great reputation around the world. Learning how to step back from a problem, examine it from all angles, and develop creative solutions is a highly useful skill to have.

This is exactly why many CEOs, tech innovators, and international dignitaries came to the United States to study. Aside from the high quality of education they received, going to a US college gave these people an in-depth opportunity to explore new topics and practice lateral and creative thinking.

Simply put, learning how to write effectively in English, solve problems creatively, and present projects to large groups of people are extremely compelling reasons to go to school in the States. Whether you want to invent a revolutionary product, be a leading researcher in your field, or deliver inspirational speeches as a politician or CEO, these skills will serve you well throughout your lifetime.

### 3. IMPROVED ENGLISH

Let's face it folks: the world runs on English. To survive in the business world, publish in many academic journals, and pursue other professional and educational opportunities in the US, you'll need to be able to speak English...and speak it WELL.

English is no walk in the park. There are tons of irregular verbs, confusing regional accents, and idioms like "walk in the park." There is no better way to learn English than to live in an English-only environment for a few years. You can study all you want in English class, but until you're forced to speak the language on a daily basis, you'll never master it.



#### 4. PREPARATION FOR GRADUATE SCHOOL

America also has some of the best graduate schools in the world, and their professors will expect you to be able to write American-style essays and research papers. There's no better way to learn how to do this than to attend college in the States.

Plus, American graduate school admissions officers know and respect American undergraduate colleges. They will be familiar with the undergraduate program you attended, perhaps even the professors who wrote your recommendations. A good recommendation from a respected American professor can go a long way toward getting you into a top graduate program in the United States.

So. Now that you've seen what college is all about and decided to come to the US to continue your education, let's get a little more specific: what are your choices... and how do you choose?

**End of Preview.**