



US University Admissions for International School Students



The US is one of the world's most popular destinations for studying abroad, with more than one million international students studying there each year. Not only are the majority of the top 10 global universities located in the US, but it's also home to more than 5,000 higher education institutions across the country.

From world-class faculty and facilities to powerful alumni networks and career opportunities — these are just some of the benefits of attending a top university in the US!

But what does it really take to get in?



Each year, thousands of top high school students from around the world look to the US to pursue higher education. A recent survey of 559 US institutions by the Institute of International Education (IIE) revealed almost two-thirds (65%) of US universities reported an **increase in application for admission from international students** for the 2022-2023 academic year.

Attending an **international private school** with a rigorous curriculum — such as the IB, AP, and A-Levels — gives you a distinct advantage. However, it does not guarantee you a place at a top US university. In fact, admissions officers hold international private school students at a higher standard than students from schools with less resources.

There's a lot more that goes into a college application and more significantly, how a student is assessed both against the general applicant pool and other international students.

This eBook will provide an overview of the application process to top US universities, and what you can do as an international student to maximize your chances of admission success!



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01. Why Study at a Top US University?

The US is home to some of the world's most respected and well-known educational institutions. There are the eight Ivy League universities: [Princeton](#), [Yale](#), [Harvard](#), [Columbia](#), [the University of Pennsylvania](#), [Cornell](#), [Dartmouth](#) and [Brown](#). Beyond the Ivy League, you'll also find a long list of other world-leading universities including [Stanford](#), [MIT](#), and the University of California 'family' including [UCLA](#) and [UC Berkeley](#).

US universities are well known for their excellent academic reputations, small class sizes, personalized approach to education, as well as their faculty support, research opportunities, study abroad programs, and coveted internships. Here are a few more benefits of attending a top US university:



World-class faculty and facilities

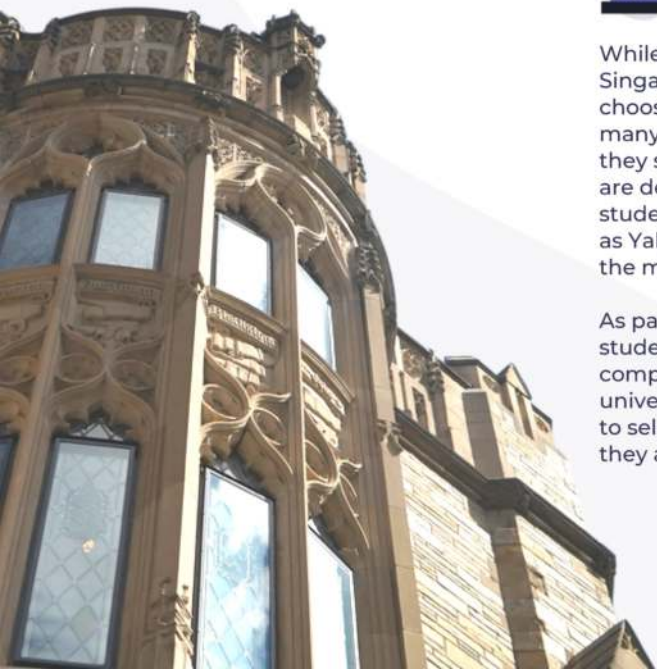
Prestigious US universities attract top teaching talent thanks to their academic reputation, resources, and aptitude of students. For example, at universities such as Yale, Stanford, or MIT, a student might have a Nobel Laureate, Turing Medal winner, or a Pulitzer winner as their professor! From historical buildings to high-tech labs, leading US universities provide their students and staff the best conditions for academic success and personal development.



Freedom and flexibility

While students in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and the UK are required to choose a profession from the beginning, many end up changing their minds after they sample the course. US universities are dedicated to developing their students' broad intellectual capacities to, as Yale puts it: Liberate, educate, and free the mind "to its fullest potential."

As part of their commitment to providing students with a broad and comprehensive education, most US universities do not require their students to select a 'major', or area of study, until they are in their second year!





Diverse campus community

In the US, the great majority of students live on campus during their four years of study and become part of an active student community. A rich, diverse student body means students are also able to meet fellow-students from all over the world, forming global connections and true international life-long friendships!



Employment opportunities & alumni network

Networking at university is an important way to start nurturing and building your connections to kickstart your career. While top colleges in other countries do give you opportunities to work at big firms, US university networks provide unique opportunities at world-leading companies and institutions such as Google, Facebook, Tesla, and more. By combining location-based employment opportunities with a world-class alumni network, you effectively set yourself up for success well beyond graduation.

With these employment opportunities also comes the lifelong benefit of **higher post-graduate salaries** and accelerated rates of promotion. In fact, graduates from the world's best universities achieve salaries that are often over **\$40,000 USD more per year** than the average post-graduate student salary!



Finding Your Best Fit

The US offers a wide variety of disciplines and each has its own culture and environment, so you are bound to find a top institution that you will thrive at. However, it is also ultra-competitive, and international students have so many factors to consider when applying to these universities.



From Kaitlin Eison-Washington, Crimson US admissions expert and Harvard graduate: **"be honest with yourself and identify your non-negotiables.** Do you need the hustle and bustle of vibrant city life to stay motivated? Do you need one-on-one support from professors and advisors? Would you be completely bummed if your school didn't have an entrepreneurial incubation lab? Do you need absolute freedom to explore your academic and personal interests? Understanding what you need from your college experience will help you narrow your search options."

Our admissions experts are here to help you craft a balanced school list based on your interests and goals. In fact, the **'best fit' philosophy is key to Crimson's personalized approach to overseas university acceptance!**

02. Applying as an International School Student: What You Need to Know

To begin, let's examine what we know about international schools and what your status as an international private school student means to your US university applications.

+ Overview

International students make up an important part of the student body at US universities because of the diversity of perspectives they bring to campus communities. Increasing competition for top universities has made standing out more important than ever, and not all international students have the support they need to succeed.

+ Peer to Peer Competition

Students at top international private schools are held to higher standards in college admissions than students from schools with less resources, academic and extracurricular opportunities, and/or counseling support.

Moreover, international private school students are not just assessed to a higher caliber, but also against the students in their immediate cohort. Top US universities will assess international students not only against the general pool but also against students from similar school backgrounds.



US admission pro Kevin Dupont-Alyaqoub explains why school context is crucial to admissions: Whether it be from the perspective of extracurricular activities or curricula, international students need to be mindful that they are evaluated based on their school context and should maximize the opportunities there, while also ensuring that they have done the best that they can in the most demanding curriculum they can take comfortably without allowing their grades to drop."



+ International School Reputation

Despite their reputations for stellar academics and facilities, many international schools only have one, or even no school counselors qualified to guide students on the US admissions process. This can prove frustrating for students in need of more support and attention — especially given the complex nature of the holistic US university application process.



At Crimson, we understand the value of individualized support. Every country has a different process, every university degree is unique, and every decision will have an impact on your future. That's why we believe that every student deserves individualized support. Book a free [one-on-one consultation](#) with an Academic Advisor to learn more.

So how do you stand out as an international student in the admissions process to top US universities? In order to get into top universities, you need to:

- ✓ **Plan early**
- ✓ **Understand the US admissions process**
- ✓ **Maximize every aspect of your application!**



03. Why Planning Early Is Key to US University Admissions

The US university application process involves research, planning, and investing time into your academics, extracurricular activities, and eventually the creation of your personal statement and other supplemental essays. Each piece of the application is an opportunity for you to tell universities why you will make the perfect addition to that university community.

However, it can feel overwhelming. How do you balance the application process with your rigorous curriculum demands, extracurricular activities, time with family and friends, and most importantly, time to yourself?

It's important to take care of your mental health during this college application process. With the right advice and support, the application process can not only be manageable, but also a powerful opportunity for self-discovery.

When and how do you get started in your preparation to a top US university?

A good way to start is to understand exactly what a successful US application timeline looks like — keep reading to learn more!



Remember: it's never too early to start thinking about university

Your first two years of high school are when you start exploring extracurricular opportunities and honing your leadership skills. The earlier you start preparing for university, the longer you'll have to showcase your grades, extracurricular activities, and leadership skills!



04. US Admissions Preparation Timeline



Plan tours of the universities you're applying to

Take the SAT or ACT for the first time

This is a good time to assess your level and identify areas of improvement for your next try

Take an English language exam (if required)

Choose between the TOEFL and IELTS if you're applying from a non-native English speaking country

Start approaching teachers for letters of recommendation

Begin writing your Common App essay

1 year
before applying

9 months
before applying

6 months
before applying

Finalise all application requirements and prepare to submit!

Take the SAT or ACT for the second time

Start researching financial aid and scholarship options

Work on any supplemental essays required for the colleges you are applying to

1 month
before applying

4 months
before applying

5 months
before applying



Important Application Deadlines



Nov Early Action & Early Decision deadline

Jan Regular Round applications are due

Jan - Feb Attend interview

Mar - Apr Results are in!

May Most universities require you to make a decision by the 1st of May

Application Checklist



- Completed Common Application, including essay
- University-specific supplemental essays
- Final SAT/ACT scores
- School grades and predicted scores
- Teacher recommendation letter(s)
- \$75 application fee



05. Overview of the US Admission Process

Common Application: The US Application Portal

The [Common Application](#), more commonly known as the Common App, is an easy-to-use online application form that gathers all your information in a single space enabling you to fill out one central application that goes to multiple universities.

More than 900 schools in the US and many worldwide accept the Common App. While the Common App is used more often than any other college application system, many colleges allow students to submit their applications through the [Coalition Application](#) and the [Universal College Application](#).

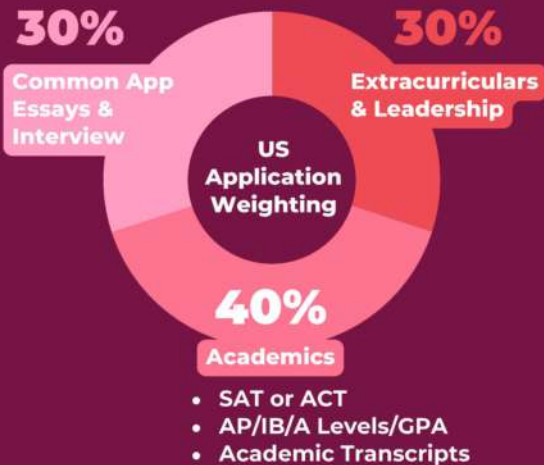
Note: While many universities join the Common App list every year, some institutions such as the UC schools, Georgetown University, and MIT, do not use the Common App and use their own application systems instead.

The Common App consists of several targeted pieces which come together to create a profile of who you are — as a student, as a person, and as a university candidate. Read ahead to understand the different components of a successful application and how to stand out as an international student!



What Do US Universities Look For?

An **All-rounder:** a combination of leadership, intelligence, creativity, and initiative.



01. Academic Requirements

Academics are **the first criteria** admissions officers consider when determining who gets a spot on campus. Top universities want to ensure that the students they select will be well-prepared for a demanding learning environment.

+ Academic Transcripts

Your high school transcript is a record of all the classes you've taken in high school, the final grades that you received, the credits you earned for each one, and potentially your class rank.

US universities also consider your **Grade Point Average (GPA)**, usually calculated on a scale between 0.0 and 4.0 which is a measure of your academic achievement that is used as the first point of comparison with other candidates.

As an international student, determining your GPA can be challenging as some countries operate on a unique scaling system. At Crimson, we have developed multiple GPA calculators for different curricula that may be helpful during this process. Check out the Resources tab on our [website](#) for more information!



+ Curriculum Rigor

There are different curriculums taught at international schools around the world, so choosing the one that best suits your academic goals is critical. You can determine which curriculum is right for you by looking at factors such as the course load, assessment structure, learning objectives, etc.

APs, IBs, and A-Levels are among the most challenging academic options available to international school students. Upon completion, each of these programs will provide independent documentation certifying higher achievement than a high school diploma. Check out [this eBook](#) for a more detailed breakdown of each curriculum!



The **International Baccalaureate (IB)** is an international organization that aims for its students to be globally aware, using international resources and content. **A-Levels** are developed by the British government using predominantly British content but adapted for the international market. **Advanced Placement (AP)** courses are often taken in addition to a foundational curriculum to boost your application specifically for US universities.



Need help deciding which curriculum is best for you? Crimson can help. [Schedule a free consultation](#) with one of our expert Academic Advisors, who can answer all your questions and help get you started on the path to success.

+ Standardized Testing

The SAT and ACT

The SAT and ACT are standardized tests designed to assess your readiness for US colleges and provide a common data point that admissions officers use to compare applicants. Although both exams are respected and recognized by most universities, their **scoring, length, and subject matter** distinguish them from one another.

Online practice tests, like [Crimson's free SAT mini test](#), are available in abundance so that you can compare scores and determine what style of questions works best for you.



You should aim to take the SAT or ACT in your late 10th, 11th, or early 12th year of high school, regardless of which exam you choose. Taking the test earlier gives you more time to retake it if you don't do as well as expected.

As a response to COVID-19, US universities made standardized test scores optional, with hundreds of schools declaring them permanently unnecessary. However, college admissions experts still recommend that you take these tests. It provides a firm data point that universities can use to compare you against other applicants, while showing that you are serious enough about academics to take that extra step.



Frida Lundgren, Crimson US Admissions Strategist and former international student at Tufts University, offers the following advice:

01.

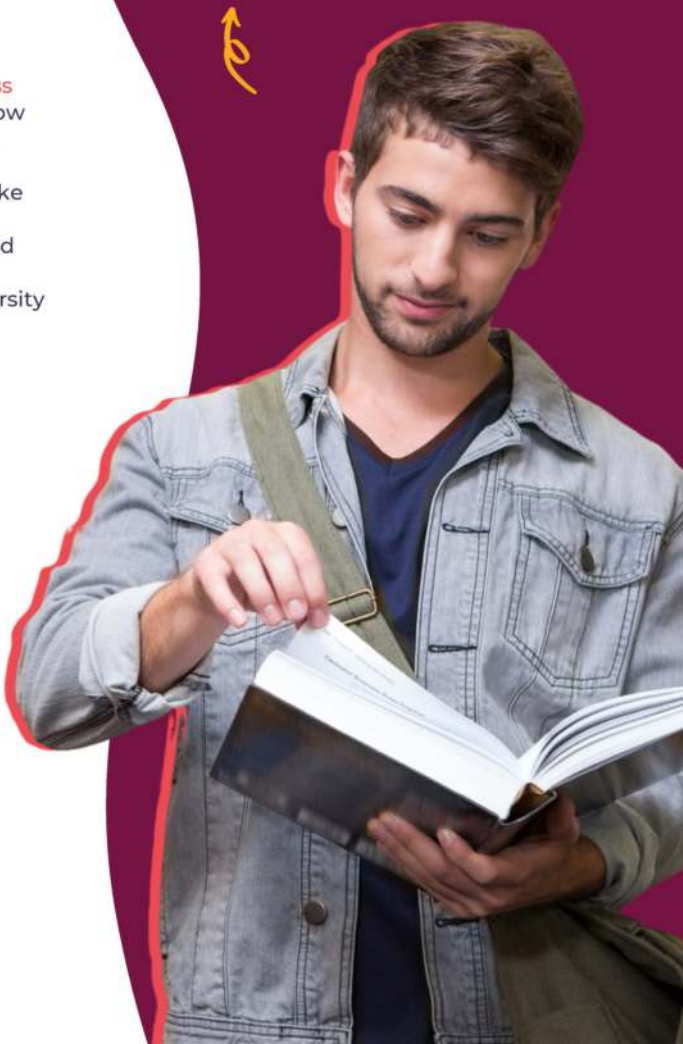
Aim for academic competitiveness and rigor: universities want to know that you are strong academically. Make sure that you challenge yourself in your curriculum (i.e. take that hard class! Don't just choose easier classes for an "easier A") and take up further academic other opportunities (ex: for-credit university summer programs) if you can.

02.

If you're aiming for top schools, pursue standardized testing: the SAT, ACT, and even American AP exams provide standardized ways for admissions officers to compare you to students from other curricula. English proficiency tests like the TOEFL, IELTS, and Duolingo prove your readiness to study in an English-taught academic environment. If you're pursuing a national rather than an international (or American) curriculum, this can definitely add an extra boost to your application!

Academics still matter. Low school grades and standardized tests scores are the easiest way to eliminate a candidate in a competitive pool. Improve your academics, decide upon the right subject choices, and explore opportunities beyond those offered at your school.

For a more in-depth understanding of how your grades stack up for top US universities, speak with one of [Crimson's Academic Advisors](#), who can answer all your questions about your academic transcript, GPA, class rank, curricula, test scores, and more!





02. Extracurricular Activities

With more students applying to the world's best universities than ever, admissions officers have to look far beyond academics to find the best candidates. While top grades and impressive test scores can help your application get past the first glance, **extracurricular activities, leadership roles, and personal experiences** will set you apart from thousands of students applying to the same competitive universities!



From US Crimson Strategist, Dakota Bowman, here are 3 types of extracurricular activities to boost your US university application:

Extracurriculars can often be sorted into 3 different categories: academic pursuits, community engagement, and personal interests. Each type of activity strengthens your list in a different way.

01.

Academic pursuits, like doing a research project or completing a summer program related to your prospective college major, display both passion and expertise in the subject. Admissions officers want to see genuine passion that will guide you in your undergraduate years. Going above and beyond outside the classroom, especially with a program that is hosted by a reputable institution or organization, will solidify that part of your profile.

02.

Community engagement can be membership in a service organization, tutoring, or anything that shows a desire to collaborate with and assist other people. Colleges don't just want someone who is academically competent: graduates should also meaningfully utilize their prowess to make a positive impact on the world. Additionally, having this sort of engagement instills confidence that a student will be a part of the campus community and contribute to the personality and atmosphere of the institution. Socialization and community service are skills that can be developed and are just as important as any transcript or intellectual accolade.

03.

Leadership contributes to the idea of "be the change you want to see in the world". To make positive impacts, a person will often have to initiate a new club, idea, event, etc. themselves. But leadership doesn't have to just be acting as the founder or president of an organization. Perhaps a club at school could benefit from a better online presence: taking the initiative to build a better website or improve Facebook and Instagram pages is a form of leadership. While this may not always result in an official position, it is still a form of leadership that can come through in activity descriptions and essays. Proactive support of others by seeing what they need and providing it, rather than waiting for them to ask for that help, can often show greater leadership than nominal positions of authority.



US: Building your Common App Activities List

The Common App includes a dedicated Activities List for students to describe their extracurricular and leadership activities in order of importance. As a general rule, you'll want to start by listing your most meaningful and impressive activities first!

Learn more about building your Common App activities in our [US extracurriculars ebook!](#)



03. Application Essays

An important component of your US university application is your Common App personal statement. This essay goes to all of the universities you apply to, enabling admissions officers to better understand who you are as an individual. In 650 words or less, you must reflect on your accomplishments and provide personal anecdotes beyond your quantitative achievements.

Your Common App essay should demonstrate personal growth and the insights you've gained through your reflections on a formative experience. Successful essays are often humble and reflect a student's capacity to struggle with, and conquer, difficult concepts. Students should not be afraid to admit their mistakes, show how mentors inspired them, or celebrate their resilience in times of indecision or hardship.



The following tips from Crimson US Admissions Expert Brice O'Connell will help you choose what to write about in your Personal Statement:



01.

Make sure it's personally meaningful: for some universities, this is the only essay you submit so it's your one chance to show off who you are and what's important to you.

02.

Demonstrate growth: how did you change, grow, and become who you are today? Show the path that brought you from passion, from idea, from motivation to action and accomplishment.

03.

Avoid regurgitating your resume: that doesn't work because admissions officers get to see that information elsewhere in your application. You shouldn't repeat what's happening in your activity list, your transcript, or even your letters of recommendation.

04.

Avoid clichés: pick a story that's unique to you. Remember that admissions officers read thousands of essays, so you want to make sure you're telling them a story — an example of growth that only you could share.

05.

Avoid trying to sound too "academic": you want to keep your voice true to you. Read your drafts aloud; if it doesn't sound like something you would say naturally, then it's probably not a good fit for something you should submit on your personal statement.

US Supplemental Essays

The Common Application prompts are the standard questions that every school you apply to gets answers for — but the supplemental questions represent an individual university's best chance to get to know you further and judge whether or not you'll be a good fit on their campus.

If you are interested in learning more about US supplemental essays, as well as top tips on answering them, check out [this eBook](#) dedicated to supplemental essays!



Have you drafted your essays and are now looking for expert suggestions? Perhaps you're experiencing writer's block and need support in approaching your essays? If so, you can [have your essays reviewed by an admissions expert!](#) The process is simple: submit your essay with an order form that lets our Essay Review team know what you need support with and by when. It's as easy as attaching your file, asking for advice and hitting send!



04. Interviews

Although not all US universities have an interview process, for those that do, it's an opportunity to showcase your personality beyond your application. The interviews seek to ensure you are who you portray yourself to be, to show you have done your research about the school, and to make sure you're a great overall fit for the university.



According to Anjali Bhatia, CEO of Collegewise: "Top universities are looking for someone who is a good future leader and will be a strong alumnus. Don't be afraid to be ambitious in terms of saying what you'd love to do in the future for the university. Similarly, show that you give back to a community (any of the many ones you are currently a part of). Don't just talk about what the school will give you, talk a lot about how you'll make the community more vibrant both as a current student and alumni."



05. Teacher References

Recommendation letters help build your holistic application by allowing people in your life to give their personal and professional opinions about your academic performance, character and drive. If you want to receive favorable and convincing recommendations, establish strong relationships with teachers, key staff, and leaders of your extracurricular activities.

Plan your letters well ahead of the application deadlines as counselors and teachers are often inundated with letter requests! Remember, when asking for the recommendation, always let them know the deadline for submitting the letter, and don't be afraid to send polite reminders as the deadline approaches.



06. Top Three Common Mistakes to Avoid in Your Application



Natalie Siu, Crimson US Strategist, shares the top three mistakes to avoid when completing the Common App:

01.

Over-explaining: Students often work under "the more the better" mindset and want to spell everything about their life out on the application. But actually, the strategy here is to be succinct, clean and focused. The entire application should follow a clear narrative that tells the story of you and highlights the best aspect of your education, interests, personality and potential.

02.

Forgetting to proofread: If there's one document a high school student should be reviewing at least 10 times, it is the Common App. Print it out and read through it on paper, show it to your older cousin or ask your school teacher for a proofreading favor. Someone is bound to find some mistakes and you definitely want to catch and correct them before it's too late!

03.

Writing too generally: Whether it's the Activities List or all of the essays, you wouldn't want your achievements to be immeasurable or your writing to be predictable. The "show-not-tell" concept here is very key as to how you should approach choosing the right topics, putting together the content and elaborating using examples.

Conclusion

There is no doubt to the benefits of attending a top international private school, and when it comes to university admissions, this will inevitably have a positive impact on your chances of acceptance to a prestigious US university. That being said, a lot more needs to be done if your child is aiming for the world's top institutions like the Ivy League, Stanford, MIT, and beyond.

With your future at stake, going that extra mile and giving yourself an 'edge' that sees your application accepted over others could be the deciding factor in admission to the world's top universities.

While your child may be in a cohort supported by one, two or more dedicated counselors, at Crimson, we surround our students with a dedicated team of experts — including Former Admissions Officers — who specialize in each area of the US admissions process, from academics to extracurriculars, essays to interviews.

How does this work? Keep reading to learn more about our student success rates, and feel free to help your child kick start their journey by clicking here to request a free consultation with one of our expert Academic Advisors.

07. The International School Student Edge: How Crimson Can Support You

01. Discovering your top US university admissions goals

The most important thing to remember is that the initial Crimson conversation is a two-way street! While our Academic Advisors are there to understand your top US university admissions goals, you can ask as many questions as you like in return!

Once the advisor has a good idea of details such as your age, current academic situation and passions,

they can then make recommendations as to the next steps in your journey.

Make sure to ask your Academic Advisors about opportunities to research with a top US university professor, intern with companies like Uber or PwC and take advantage of other opportunities available to Crimson students!



70% of students know very little about the US/UK application process

You are here

Stay calm and talk to an Academic Advisor



100% of students figured out exactly what and where they wanted to study with help from Crimson

02. Identifying your strengths and areas of improvements

Now that we've discussed your goals and aspirations, it's time to evaluate your odds of admission to their goals schools.

Based on your profile, a personalized program tailored to your individual strengths and potential areas of improvement will be built.

Build your services

- ✓ Extracurricular and Leadership
- ✓ Mentoring
- ✓ Application Strategy
- ✓ Test Prep
- ✓ Essay Prep
- ✓ Best-fit University Selection

03. Generating your unique game plan

At Crimson, we work with hundreds of international school students every year and as such we are acutely aware of both the competitive nature of top schools admissions and how you can build a memorable application that resonates above the thousands of accomplished submissions.

After your consultation, we will formulate the best-fit Crimson program for you to help you achieve your greatest education goals.

When you're happy with your carefully constructed program, your journey begins.



Our Results

Crimson students are up to

7x

more likely to get accepted
into their dream university

Here are just some of our
student results:

686

*Offers to the
Ivy League*

1114

*Offers to the
US Top 10*

4,000+

*Offers to the
US Top 50*

232

*Offers to Oxford
and Cambridge*





Ready to get started?

[Talk to us](#)



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