

Green Hills Academy

“Towards Excellence”



COLLEGE COUNSELLING HANDBOOK

(For Students)

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GLOSSARY

Associate degree: A degree granted by a college or university after satisfactory completion of a two- year full-time program of study.

Bachelor's degree: A degree received after the satisfactory completion of a four or five-year full-time program of study (or its part-time equivalent) at a college or university.

Master's degree: A degree (sometimes called a post-graduate degree) pursued after a student has earned a bachelor's degree.

Transcript: A copy of a student's official academic record listing all courses taken and grades achieved.

IB1: The first year of the two - year International Baccalaureate diploma program. (commonly known as grade 11).

IB2: The final year of the two - year International Baccalaureate diploma program. (commonly known as grade 12).

Foreword:

We have compiled this booklet to help you navigate the stormy waters of the university application process. Students should aim to submit a manageable but sufficient number of high quality applications under minimum pressure. This will leave you free to focus on your mock and final exams.

Every year, the last-minute applicant makes her/his appearance in the office: exhausted (s/he has been frantically filling in forms all night), s/he arrives clutching a heap of papers (some now falling to the floor): “Is it really too late to...register for SAT/ask for a reference/meet the Early Decision Deadline/send the sample work/apply for a fee waiver?” Leaving everything to the last minute is guaranteed to produce erratic applications: the school is unlikely to be cooperative in such a botched venture. Recommenders may have limited time. So start early and adhere to our deadlines even if the university’s deadline is in February. In the past students have taken advantage of the fact that some staff remained in school well into the holidays. Please be aware that many will not be around during holidays to help and will not be overly keen on responding to desperate emails during the break.

Thanks too to all teachers and administrators who help with recommendations throughout the process.

I trust that you are inspired by the success of your predecessors in gaining wonderful opportunities in tertiary education. Please do not be complacent or ambivalent, Keep your options open, have a plan B!

“Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there!”

Please keep this booklet until you are safely at college as there are tips within for the months after you have left GHA.

Lastly, I hope that the process of applying might be an enjoyable one as you contemplate life beyond GHA.

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1. WHY?

A successful tertiary education opens a wealth of opportunities. It also provides a satisfying and exciting experience in its own right.

There are many options: the traditional university, a new establishment, a specialist institution (e.g. technikon, dance, art or drama college), liberal arts college or women's colleges. Keep your options open, make sure that you have a range of choices to cover all eventualities once your IB results are released.

Think about what you want from your life after GHA and which institution/course will best suit you. These are your choices. This is your life!

2. GAP YEAR?

One option is to take a gap year.

Gap year options include: work experience/volunteer work/language learning or other study and travel.

This link gives options to gap year programs:

www.yearoutgroup.org and www.gapyear.com

3. CHOOSING A COURSE

Some of you will know which area of study you wish to pursue. Others don't, but there are lots of resources - websites and publications - to give you ideas. Teachers will be able to provide honest feedback on where your strengths may lie if you are not sure.

You will need to be realistic about your aptitude and about the opportunities that are open to you given your IB subject combination; I am happy to advise on this. UCAS website at www.ucas.com provides tips on career self-assessment programs.

Remember too that there are many courses available, which involve subjects you have **not** encountered at school: Investigative Law, Politics, International Relations and Marketing or whatever it might be. Some courses are not available at undergraduate level in some countries, for example it is not possible to do medicine in the US or Canada at first degree level. Explore

other careers outside the usual 'doctor-dentist-lawyer-banker' routine: Check the guides in the college office.

I strongly recommend that you are proactive in seeking work experience and work shadowing opportunities. The school intends to help in this area but it really is your responsibility to seek opportunities.

Contact Admissions Offices of universities to seek their advice (but never ask questions which are answered on their websites). Whilst there are courses which commit you to a profession (medicine, dentistry, veterinary science), many courses are more open-ended and provide an excellent starting point for a range of occupations.

4. WHERE?

Consider:

- Employment prospects for graduates and crucially for most- is there any form of **financial aid** available?
- Location – USA, Canada, Europe, Australia, UK, home country? Consider climate, culture, and distance from home. Do you want to be thousands of miles from your home and family? There is nothing wrong with wanting to study in your home country and in many cases, it might well be your most effective career route!
- City-based, suburban, rural: is there a campus?
- Size of the university, department.
- Academic status/reputation of institution/subject - assessments of research and teaching quality.
- Teaching and assessment methods - choose the learning environment which best suits you.
- Subject choice availability/flexibility/combination
- Degree structure - yearly progression or modularization, terms or semesters.
- Student composition - international student body, or mainly monocultural? Single-sex or mixed?
- Student life – what is the nature and quality of everyday student life going to be like for you?
- Accommodation provision.
- Living costs - how expensive is the university town to live in? Are there part time jobs on campus?
- Academic facilities - library, computer resources, research opportunities, special strengths e.g. science, arts.
- Other facilities - welfare, sports.
- If specializing, be sure the university is accredited and universally recognized if you wish to work in that country (for example, for teaching, counseling, dentistry, etc.)

- Links with 'outside world' – e.g. government, business, finance, other educational institutions - how much help, formal or otherwise, might the institution be able to give you after you graduate?

First things first

The above are guides to ways to select an institution: some of the above factors will be much more important for you than others and you cannot be completely clinical about your choices, but you can make sure that universities you apply to are suitable for your needs. Every year, students who have not researched the institution properly make an application only to discover that the course they want is not offered, or that this institution does not offer Financial Aid to International Students. Identify key factors first. Don't select on the basis of the name, look for a place that is a good fit for you!

Be realistic

Ultimately, it is important to be realistic about how attractive a candidate you will be for any given establishment. The more competitive an institution, the stronger your application will need to be. So, formulate a sense of your strengths, and make realistic applications. For example, a student making an Ivy League application would need a minimum predicted grade total of 40 points. Applicants for pre- medicine will need to have predicted grades totalling 36 at the very least. University prospectuses and web sites will have information about course requirements.

Every year students fail to make realistic applications: this wastes time and leads to unhappiness. Your cycle grades and mock results are very good indicators of how you will ultimately perform. It is not easy even for a counsellor to support an unrealistic application!

A consistently impressive performance through IB1 and IB2 is vital, your, IB cycle grade transcript is one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence!

Not to mention your conduct and contributions which should be exemplary if you want enthusiastic support from the school for your applications!

A good tactic is to apply to six institutions per country (indeed this is the limit!): two 'reaches' (places which might accept you with a bit of luck), two 'realistics' (places which fit your current performance) and two 'insurances' (places which would be likely to accept an applicant a bit weaker than you): it should be possible to find 'insurance' or 'safety' places which you would happily attend.

Bear in mind when you are reading prospectuses and viewing websites that the material is promotional: indeed, some colleges will invite you to apply (be suspicious of this!) sift through the information and ask yourself what it might be like for **you** to attend that college. One-way is

to read campus newspapers to get a feel for the place: consult www.newsdirectory.com/college/press

Better still, email a former GHA student who is studying at that university or seek constant help from the college office and faculty members.

5. GETTING ORGANISED

It is stressful to apply to universities whilst preparing for exams: applications require sustained work and you need to do them properly: you could find yourself needing to write several essays, submit sample work, provide financial information and other things which are not easily achievable at the last minute. For this reason, you should regard university applications as another subject during term one/two of IB2. You should have a separate file to help you collate information. Keep a folder of emails and all correspondences from the university: a lost reference/PIN number can make life frustrating. Of course, you should keep a hard copy of everything that you might mail, and make sure everything is saved on both hard drive and on your flash.

Being organized means less work, done less intensely, under less pressure and is liable to produce better results. You may be tempted to wait until after your final exams to do a lot of the work but this is discouraged as you will not have the school resources to help you in the process. At least register for your university applications (ie commonapp.org and ucas.com) and clarify every expectation with your referees before you leave so that you can check with me that you are on the right track.

College office and Library

The Careers office and school library though relatively well stocked, cannot cater for all institutions in which GHA students might have an interest. Of course, the most up to date information is usually to be found on websites. Do spare time and visit the college office.

Websites

Check the following websites www.braintrack.com and www.unigo.com have links to universities throughout the world.

Start early

I cannot stress how crucial it is that you **adhere to our internal deadlines**. University applications should be sorted before your final exams! **Let me be clear**: Late requests for transcripts and recommendations put pressure on the faculty and everyone would like to do a good job on a student application.

TIMESCALE

By end of Term One IB2

- Read through this booklet and keep it safe for reference.
- Email your pre-IB transcript (translated if necessary) to careers@greenhillsacademy.rw as a pdf document less than 500kb.
- Research on websites/in careers office or library
- Talk to parents, friends, former students, older siblings and your teachers and **ME!**
- Draw up list of possible institutions: aim for a 'long shortlist' of about 10 or 12 institutions in more than one country.
- Read their prospectuses and websites in detail, highlight deadlines
- Identify whether you have all necessary information: do you need signature/financial information from your parents? The US International Financial Aid Form is lengthy and requires specific information.
- Are there gaps in the strength of your application which you can rectify by taking action now? (A number of applicants for Medicine every year suddenly discover they have had no experience of working in any clinical setting. If you have applied for an art related course, do you have a suitable portfolio?).
- Be aware of SAT registration deadlines and attend prep sessions (if considering North America). Ideally if you are sitting SAT, it is good to have identified at least four of your likely institutions by the time you register: this will allow you to have college board send your SAT results automatically to them. You will need to sit the SAT 1 in May if you are applying to Ivy Leagues which want SAT 2, which you could then sit in October (or November though you would wish to avoid this distraction during your IB exams).
- If you are applying for Health Sciences (Medicine, Pharmacy, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy etc) or indeed any course in UK or SA be sure to know the additional tests requires e.g the IELTS or the relevant test.

Ensure that your cycle grades are where you want them to be! If not then you have one term left to meet your potential. I cannot over emphasize the fact that admission decisions are based on concrete evidence of your ability, not on where you think you should be performing!

Get involved in as many school events and activities as possible to make you as attractive as possible to admissions officers. They are looking for leaders, movers and shakers! The application process is an art not a science so the qualitative stuff is just as important as the quantitative!

Vacation between Term One and Two

- Narrow your focus and research and move towards your shortlist. Secure any parental help/advice/signatures.

Term Two (Early)

- Refine list of institutions (max 6 per country except the UK - 5).
- Identify deadlines.
- Approach referees to ask if they are willing to write you a reference: if so, provide them with a completed Reference Request Form and anything else they require: I suggest you submit a summary of your achievements in all areas. Briefing the referee properly and in good time brings about better results. Make it clear to them if you are applying to the UK or USA. The tone of the reference is quite different depending on where you are applying.

Later in Term 2

1. Submit a draft of your personal essay/statement to the college office.
2. Register at commonapp.org and enter email addresses of the college counsellor and your referees and then “assign” us and check that we have received your invitation link. Or use other college websites to apply.
3. Attend all advertised meetings which are relevant to your university application. These meetings will often require you to do some work in between (e.g. research, writing statements etc.)
4. Inform the college counselor you want to be considered for any scholarship that requires a nomination from GHA – e.g. Scholarships in Canada, certain scholarships in the US (Mastercard foundation, NYUAD etc.).
5. Attend the Careers Fair that may be available at GHA and outside.

You are entirely responsible for the organisation and timing of each and every part of your application.

COLLATING APPLICATIONS:

- When requesting a reference from a teacher you will always need to specify the institution, the course and show any personal statement/application forms, so that the reference is pertinent and informed.
- Keep a record of what you have done and what remains to be done. A form without a signature or with a single piece of information omitted is unimpressive and will certainly cause delays. Many applications have checklists - use these.
- It is crucial that your referee understands exactly what needs to be done and by when. Make sure s/he is fully briefed.
- For all applications, keep a photocopy of everything sent with proof of postage (if you are not applying online (although this is best) registered post is normally reliable: courier might be better for any first choices.
- It is vital that you are consistent with the name that you use on your applications and any other university business like SAT registration. Always use your name as it appears on your passport to avoid problems with study visa applications!
- Those applying for Art/Design/Architecture courses:
You will need to assemble a collection of good quality photographs of your work. They need to be stamped with the school stamp on the reverse, signed by the Head of Visual Arts.

Term 3

Please ensure that your parents or guardians have provided all the documents needed.

- On receiving your mock results, you should be in a good position to finalise your list of colleges that you wish to apply to.
- Discuss and submit this list to counsellor so that I know where to send the school part of your application.

6. UNITED KINGDOM APPLICATIONS

The UK offers excellent quality and diversity of courses. However, the crucial issue is **funding**. UK fees and cost of living are prohibitively expensive for most international students (+£500,000) and scholarships are rare.

A degree (with automatic honors) is generally a three-year course, though Engineering, Languages, and Scottish universities tend to operate four years. Medicine, veterinary science, architecture and dentistry vary from five to six years. UK degrees are generally more specialized than the liberal arts programs available in the USA.

Applications to the UK are straightforward as there is a centralized application system called 'UCAS' (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service) via which students apply to their chosen universities (up to five institutions). Note that you may apply only for FOUR Medicine courses. Medicine is hugely competitive for International students and still highly competitive for home students. Also, be aware that courses like Medicine and Law require you to take extra tests (BMAT/UKCAT/LNAT/TSA) which you can register for online or at available centers. Please see me for more information. It is your responsibility to register online for these tests.

If you are asking for a reference for the UK please make sure that your referee knows that they need to sell you for a particular course!

How UCAS works at GHA

Here at GHA, the application must be made through the Electronic Application System "Apply" at www.ucas.com. You must register through GHA by using our buzzword (Nyarutarama1). There is only one referee required for UCAS, but I suggest that you still ask two and then I will merge them together to make sure that your reference is as comprehensive as possible. Make sure your chosen referees are familiar with each and every aspect of your achievements at GHA: the UCAS reference is a general one with a focus on your suitability for the course. Ask your referees to email the reference to me at careers@greenhillsacademy.rw.

If you are applying for Medicine the deadline for applications is October 15th so you need to have submitted your part online by the end of September. For other places and courses you should submit your form online to before you leave GHA and the earlier the better as it is first come first served in the UK.

Offers (often conditional on point total) and rejections from your chosen universities usually arrive in the period October-March (depending on how early you apply). By the time you receive news from all your UK universities, you will probably be in receipt of your IB results (released July 6 or earlier). After all your offers have come in, you must choose one as a firm acceptance.

You must decide on your UK university choices by November 1st so that we can request the IBO to automatically send your final results to your chosen universities. The UCAS application fee is 20 pounds sterling payable online by credit card.

British citizens who are resident in the UK have some university fees paid for by their Local Education Authority (LEA). Note that you have to apply (in advance) to your LEA to pay for the

university course that you have chosen – it is not paid for automatically by the LEA. Contact your LEA well in advance if there is any doubt with respect to your status. Different universities have different criteria when classifying applicants for fee purposes. British citizens might find www.dfes.gov/studentsupport a useful resource.

Use www.ucas.com - offering information by subject, university or geographical location within the UK. It gives brief overviews of courses/universities, with entrance requirements

7. USA

The United States is a popular choice of study for the quality of their universities – scholarships are easier to secure in universities here. There is a huge range in the type of degree offered – you may study at a ‘college’ which usually only has undergraduate programs, or at a ‘university’ which usually has post-graduate programs too. Liberal Arts colleges provide students with a breadth of knowledge in a range of areas rather than training students for a particular job. Universities are either private or state. It is also good to know that many institutions will give credit (‘advanced standing’) for good grades (usually 6/7) at IB Higher Level.

A four-year course can be done at a ‘liberal arts’ college, a broad degree studying subjects as diverse as Biology, English and History all at one time. This is a good option for people who are not sure where they want to go with post-school education. Or a standard degree with a ‘major’ subject and a ‘minor’ subject may be done at one of the ‘universities.’ Note that Law and Medicine are graduate subjects only in the US. It is especially difficult (actually unheard of!) to access Medical School for International Students, especially if you need scholarship. Note that Law and Medicine can be taken as undergraduate courses in most other systems including South Africa and the UK.

Common Application

Each school in the USA does its own admissions, but 600 of them, including most which fund international students, accept a common application form, available on www.commonapp.org The whole point of the Common Application Form is that you are saved the trouble of filling in a number of forms which require the same information. However, all the popular colleges insist on you completing their own “supplements” which can be long and time consuming. Some also have extra requirements like writing samples or peer evaluations – e.g. Dartmouth – it is your responsibility to confirm what each college requires. Completing the CommonApp is time consuming and can be complicated so you need to leave enough time to do a decent job. I have taken advantage of Commonapp too: so I write one school report for you which gets sent to all 6 of your colleges (please make sure you have done something that will bring you to my attention in a positive way if I don’t teach you!).

On-line applications

All colleges are now providing an electronic application as an alternative to the paper version. Some colleges encourage you to do an on-line application by waiving the application fee if you apply on-line. The application fee is around \$50 or more per college so this is an important consideration! GHA can arrange for application fee waivers for those students that need – please see me to see if you are eligible. You do your part online by the deadline (so you need to allow plenty of time).

Size matters!

As a rough guide, colleges can be divided into three categories: small colleges (fewer than 3,000 students); medium colleges (3,000-10,000 students); and large colleges (10,000 plus). You will have your own preferences but it is worth knowing that many of the small colleges (which include prestigious Liberal Arts colleges like Carleton, Middlebury, St Olaf, Macalester) are keen to diversify their student body: in brief, this plays to the advantage of international and ‘minority’ students. Large colleges have more opportunities, but the disadvantage can be an impersonal bureaucracy: examples include many State universities e.g. University of Michigan, University of Florida.

What do Colleges require?

- i. Online Application form: could be either a common application form or one specific to that college
- ii. Essay(s):
- iii. Application fee – waivers are available on request
- iv. Transcripts, ie. school academic records. These comprise your record from the beginning of IB at the very least, and often we are required to produce transcripts from grade 9. (translated by you into English)
- v. Tests.

SAT 1 – Check the available dates from the college office or visit www.collegeboard.org!

The cycle starts from October thru to June. (decide what suits you best)

To register for the SAT 1:

- do this online at www.collegeboard.com well before the test date (our test center can fill up with external students so be warned!) - you can only pay by credit card here and need to upload a digital photo.
- **You must** register through GHA by using our school code – **644005** – this will mean that we will receive your results, but it is your responsibility to send your SAT scores to colleges.

It is your responsibility to find a credit card if you or your parents do not have one, GHA will assist on this (see the college office for this arrangement in good time)

SAT 2 – This test consists of specific subject tests, and many USA colleges do not require this. Some (usually the Ivy Leagues) do, so check prospectuses and it may be that they specify which three tests should be taken depending on the course you are applying for. It is **not** possible to sit SAT 1 and SAT 2 on the same day. SAT 2 is available as per SAT 1 with respect to sittings at GHA. The SAT 2 is costly and the exact cost depends on the subjects being tested.

TOEFL – This test is for students whose first language is not English: institutions wish to satisfy themselves that applicants would be comfortable studying in an all-English learning environment. Most of our IB students will not be required to do this however some of you will so do check! if you study English as a 1st Language (as most students currently do) and you are asked to prove your English proficiency, then refer to me and get a covering letter along with a standard IB letter which explains the A/B system. TOEFL is not available at GHA. See www.toefl.org

For all these tests, the American Cultural Centre Library (American Embassy, Kacyiru) has excellent resources. I recommend that all of you become members of this library (it's free!) as it has useful resources for all aspects of the application process. (especially during summer)

Also see www.review.com which is the site of the Princeton Review (nothing to do with Princeton in fact) a business which specializes in (expensive) publications to help prepare for SAT and other types of test.

There is a SAT CLUB at GHA: students will be invited to sign up in good time so that handouts can be made for them. Club is free to GHA students and are usually scheduled on Monday afternoons.

The SAT Supervisor administers the tests and will display the registration list in advance of the real SAT tests: you will be informed as to the venue and starting time. You will need to bring your ID, admissions ticket, pencils, eraser, pencil sharpener, watch and calculator.

The SAT is certainly not the most important part of your application. Don't get stressed by it at the expense of your IB subjects but do take it seriously!

Some forms (SAT registration and Common App) will ask for the CEEB number for GHA: it is 644005.

vi) 3 References which must be from two of your academic teachers and me! Always ask teachers in plenty of time and make sure they are genuinely happy to support your application: explain the nature of the course and institution. It is also a good idea to

write a summary of your achievements, extracurricular activities etc. A teacher can never really write a good reference if he/she has not been properly briefed: they are human: make it easier for them! And don't wait until you have completed all your forms before you give the referee his/her section: give them to your referee as soon as you have decided to apply. Some universities specify that they require a science teacher or a language teacher to be the referee – please check this in good time – not during the break.

If a teacher appears hesitant, then find out why: if s/he is not wanting to recommend you, find someone in a better position. Good teachers and good reference writers get swamped by students requesting references so approach them in good time during term 2.

Occasionally, a Peer Report is requested: be careful. Make sure the person you choose can write well and understands what is needed.

You are often given the opportunity to 'waive your right' to see your reference. Whilst out of curiosity you might like to see what we have to say about you, I urge you to resist the temptation to insist on this right: institutions see that you have not waived this right and the reference might not be treated so seriously. Moreover, whilst you might think a teacher would write a 'better' reference if you do not waive your right, this is almost never true: what happens is that a blander, more general report is written which, like a boring personal statement, will kill off your application. I think you have to trust your teachers to be fair and honest (and positive too).

It occasionally happens that students are worried about their Disciplinary record at GHA. If an institution has not asked us to comment on your record, there would be no need to volunteer this sort of information but please note that there is a question about disciplinary record on CommonApp! So please consider the potential long term consequences of poor decision making this year, particularly with regard to anti-social behavior and academic honesty.

Clearly if you are expelled or withdraw from the college because of disciplinary infringements the school cannot provide university references for you even if you are permitted to write your final exams and get your IB diploma.

- vii) Sample work: some institutions will ask for samples of your work. Sometimes this is stipulated in the application material, occasionally such a request is made in the light of an application. Usually marked and graded work is required: photocopies are acceptable. Often length/subject area are stipulated.

Deadlines?

Many institutions have Regular Decision deadlines around mid-December to early January, and Early Decision deadlines around early October to mid-January. However, we send all our applications earlier than this and the deadlines I have made in this booklet about applications are binding if you want to have any help from GHA.

EARLY DECISION (ED)

About 10% of American establishments offer this option including the most competitive universities.

If you apply to a college for Early Decision, you commit to attend that college if they offer you a place – so you can apply Early Decision to only one college and you must be certain that this really is your top choice. If you apply Early Decision, many colleges will let you know whether you have been accepted within weeks. The advantage is that the Admissions Committee will feel that you are serious about this commitment: of course, you will need to be sufficiently strong for them to want to offer you a place early on, without having seen the full range of the Regular Pool. (Sometimes if you are not successful in securing an Early Decision offer, you will be placed into the Regular pool.) If you are applying Early Decision, it would be a good idea to discuss this with me and your tutor. There is always an element of strategy in this process and we might wish to avoid similarly strong applicants from GHA applying to the same institution for Early Decision.

EARLY ACTION (EA)

Early Action (or Early Notification) schools allow you to apply early and receive an early notification, but they do not require you to withdraw your other applications. Applications are usually due on November 1 and notification is made in mid-December, but accepted students don't have to decide which offer to accept until the regular May 1 reply date.

Only one early application can be made ED or EA.

REGULAR DECISION

This has a deadline of early January (but remember our deadlines and our/your holidays!) with decisions usually communicated by the end of March at the latest. Most applications are of course made as Regular Decision. Very occasionally you will be put onto a Wait List, the result of which should be made known to you by May.

As stated earlier, **SIX** is the maximum number of applications to make per country: more than this can be unmanageable and usually indicates that you have not properly identified where you might be happy. Green Hills, like other high schools, will normally support only six applications

for these reasons plus this is fairer for all and the fact that they will be taken more seriously by your prospective college who asks how many other colleges you are applying to.

However, we may support a seventh if you are applying to one particular institution because of the existence of a particular scholarship or if an institution visits GHA and you have an interview with them at my request. Remember, this is not a raffle! It is not true that more equals better: aim for a small number of well informed quality applications. College lists cannot be changed after you have signed your list as correct and final. Every year some students request this after they have left to no avail so do your research now!

Cost of an education

Tuition \$ +- 40,000 USD/yr + Living \$ +-20,000 USD/yr

There are many institutions of higher education in the US; all of them offer financial assistance to US citizens and residents and some to international students.

Only about 80 offer the possibility of a 90% or higher scholarship to international students; these funds come from the school itself, from endowments.

A student must be admitted before financial aid is considered.

Need Based Financial Aid; most of the selective US colleges and universities use financial need as the primary determinant for the amount of financial aid a student is awarded.

Merit and Talent Based Aid: Some schools offer scholarship for exceptional academic achievement, athletic prowess, artistic talent, and even community service and “leadership.” Merit aid is not widely available at the “first tier” schools, but it is available at many second-tier schools in an effort to lure away the most talented students from the most selective schools. These scholarships may be sizeable, but generally do not exceed 50% of the total cost.

Need Blind vs Need Aware; colleges and universities have budget constraints, just like any other businesses. If a college is ‘need aware’, then, to be frank, any qualified applicant who can pay full fees is advantaged over the needy applicant. But there are Need Blind schools, like Harvard and Yale who process and reach a decision on your application without knowledge of your circumstances: they are wealthy enough to be able to fund all needy students and fund 100% of demonstrated need. Of course these are highly competitive places.

US Financial Aid Packages:

The International Student Financial Aid Form and Certification of Finances Form is available from www.collegeboard.com. Fill them out once with your parents' help as accurately and honestly as possible, add the necessary supporting documents and photocopy 6 times for your 6 colleges. Many students wait too long to fill out the form – this is fine as long as you take responsibility to post it to your colleges before Christmas.

Increasingly the financial aid application process is going online – it is possible to fill the CSS (college scholarship service) profile online instead – again you will need a credit card (or fee waiver code available by writing to the colleges of your choice) and a decent internet connection.

By filling out and submitting various financial aid forms, your family contribution is determined. This is based largely on income, but savings and assets (home, property, businesses, etc.) as well as outgoings are factored into the equation.

Once your family contribution is determined, it is deducted from the total costs and that leaves your “financial need.”

Websites:

www.collegeboard.com - the best starting point. It includes a ‘planning for college’ section with a good overview of SAT. Search either by college name or by majors, location etc, in database of over 3500 colleges. Gives basic information and links to college Web pages.

www.edupass.org - specifically for International Students. Look under ‘college admissions’ then ‘choose a school’ for lots of useful links giving information and the web pages of individual colleges.

www.petersons.com is easy to use and has a college search.

Flick through the American Colleges and Universities Magazine (the corresponding website is www.acuinfo.com) which gives you an idea of how it might be to study as a non US citizen in the USA.

Note that in most cases, the typical US College website is www.nameofcollege.edu Be careful – there are many colleges with the same name including at least 4 Westminster!

University Visits

At the time of writing we do not have full details for university visits to GHA: many will come. Last year we had a range of college visits (over 20), sometimes at fairly short notice. I will keep you informed. Many visits offer the opportunity for an interview which can be the most important part of the whole process. I strongly recommend that you come to as many college presentations as possible as they can be very informative and helpful even if you are not interested in the particular institution or country.

VISA

Lastly, if you are successful in securing a place in the States or anywhere abroad for that matter, take your college's advice about processing your student visa. It is a time-consuming process and you should begin the process as soon as you have accepted your place.

8. CANADA

Applying to study in Canada is more straightforward than applying to the U.S.A. because:

- There are fewer universities to choose from
- Some areas organise a centralised admissions service
- The costs are lower

Canadian universities offer a variety of programs ranging from short certificate/diploma courses to the more traditional degree courses – these are either 3 or 4 years of study. The universities are generally state funded meaning that tuition fees are lower than the USA but scholarships are less likely to be available.

Look at the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) at www.aucc.ca which has information and contact details on all courses and institutions in Canada.

Also see www.cbie.ca and, to help identify the quality of Canadian universities refer to www.macleans.ca which publishes rankings. You might also try www.collegenet.com

You can apply to all Canadian Universities through their own websites. UBC, York, SFU, Trent, Victoria and Toronto have been popular choices in the past – mainly because they offer full scholarships to deserving students. But there are many more. Please let me know if you would like to be nominated for any scholarships in Canada (including Mastercard) by the end of term 2. Some colleges only allow one nomination per school. If nominated it is your responsibility to download all the necessary forms and submit to me before you leave GHA.

Cost of an education

Tuition Canadian \$30,000 CAD/year + Living Canadian \$15,000 CAD/year (this varies from school to school). Financial help: you can get a free copy of “Awards for Study” from the Canadian Bureau of International Education. www.cbie.ca

Application deadline are in February and April for most Canadian Universities. Again, you must adhere to our deadlines as it is much more difficult to make an effective and efficient application after you have left GHA!

For all scholarship information on USA and Canada universities, see the scholarship section at the end of this booklet.

9. AUSTRALIA

There are about 40 universities in Australia ranging in size from 3,000 to more than 30,000 students. There is a total of more than 600,000 students studying in Australian universities and over 65,000 of these are international students. Scholarships are very rare.

Average fees for classroom-based courses (eg Law, Arts, Economics, etc) range between Aus\$12,000–\$14,000. Laboratory-based courses (e.g. Science, Engineering, Medicine) on average range between Aus\$15,000–\$29,000. Most courses start in February; however, some may also start in July and October. A bachelor's degree is generally 3-5 years long.

To study in Australia as an international student, you must obtain a student visa - once you have been accepted to your chosen institution, advice will be given on how to proceed. Refer to the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (DIMA) at www.immi.gov.au. In order to be granted the visa it is often necessary to take the TOEFL and/or IELTS test.

There are no official “league tables” of institutions: there are a number of publications which rate various university attributes but none rank institutions as such. A useful guide, published by the Federal Department of Education Science and Technology (FDEST) can be found at www.detya.gov.au/tenfields/.

Excellent websites include www.studyaustralia.com.au: this organisation appears to offer a range of services and even offers help with applications:

Email info@studyaustralia.com.au

Lastly, those considering New Zealand as a possible destination might refer to www.nzeil.co.nz

10. ENGLISH MEDIUM UNIVERSITIES IN EUROPE: (not based in UK).

There are plenty of these. Most offer a limited range of subjects and little if any financial aid. However, the ones that do offer financial aid are outlined in the scholarship section of this booklet. The Netherlands has been a popular choice recently and many colleges there are reasonably priced.

There are also American Universities in Paris, London, Rome etc. which could be worth considering.

11. EAST AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

They are a number of good universities in east Africa such as:

- University of Nairobi
- Moi University
- Kenyatta University
- USIU
- Makerere University
- Dar-Salam University
- University of Rwanda

All these require final results as a student applies. Grades are put equivalent in each country.

12. PERSONAL STATEMENTS/ESSAYS

These are critical because they are the only means of bringing your application to life. Admissions officers read endless applications: why should they admit a student who is going to bore everybody for three/four years? Make your statements/essays great. (check college office/your teachers for help)

Convey what is *unique, different* about you: make as an impact as possible: communicate the *person* behind the grades. For practical reasons, many of you will not have an interview, so the Personal Statements are all the more important.

How these statements are read:

- i) For content ii) For what they indicate about your ability to express yourself

UCAS Personal Statement: explain why you are perfectly suited to the **courses** you are applying for: a reminder here that whilst there is no prohibition on applying for a variety of courses, it is usual practice to **apply for the same course/ sort of course** for each of the universities. The Personal Statement needs to be informed and informative: you should demonstrate that you will both benefit from the course and contribute to the universities in question.

The instructions on the UCAS website encourage you to say something about:

- career aspiration
- reasons for choosing the course
- relevant background or experience, which may include work experience, or work shadowing, practical activity in music or theatre, attendance at courses, time abroad (you should explain why this is relevant.)
- interests, including sports, you may have which are not strictly relevant to the course, but help to give an impression of you as a person.

US College Essays: one or more specific essay questions: the important thing here is to focus on the question/issue and a primary focus must be to demonstrate that you are a perfect fit for **the college** and vice-versa. The essay should be personal and show, not tell, the reader what you have to offer in a natural way.

The Common Application makes applying to the USA fairly straightforward, however not all colleges subscribe to it. If they are not common app schools – for example Florida, Georgetown and Methodist then it is your responsibility to apply direct on their own websites.

The essay for US applications (if commonapp) has to be chosen from the following list:

Option #1: Some students have a background or story that is so central to their identity that they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story.

Option #2: Recount an incident or time when you experienced failure. How did it affect you, and what lessons did you learn?

Option #3: Reflect on a time when you challenged a belief or idea. What prompted you to act? Would you make the same decision again?

Option #4: Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

Option #5: Discuss an accomplishment or event, formal or informal, that marked your transition from childhood to adulthood within your culture, community, or family.

Every college then has their own “supplemental essays” so you will always have more than one question to answer – they all take time and effort so do not delay.

Purposes of the application essay

1. The essay gives you a chance to communicate something of yourself not already reflected in information submitted elsewhere.
2. If your academic record shows some weakness, you can use the essay to explain the problem (is it a problem overcome?) and highlight other strengths.
3. The essay gives you the opportunity to demonstrate your writing ability. If your application is borderline, the essay can help the admissions committee make a final decision. It can be used to determine, amongst other things, your seriousness (or laziness). Word limit is 650 for the USA and 4000 characters for UCAS.

Writing Your Admissions Essay

Do

- Read the question carefully.
- Discuss the question with others.
- Treat any ‘short answer’ questions seriously, too. Sometimes an applicant writes an excellent essay and then undoes all the good work with poor ‘short answers’.
- For questions that ask you to explain your involvement in extracurricular activities, choose the **key** activities and **say what they meant to you. Don’t just list. Hone in on details: be vivid, involve the reader.**
- Write a first draft.
- Be concise, specific and always avoid the banal and the general, even if the question appears to merit such a response!
- Have someone else read and give her/his opinion.
- Revise your essay.
- Have someone else (ideally a fresh set of eyes) proof-read.
- Feel free to use the same essay for different colleges, so long as the titles are compatible, but take extra care: are there any adjustments (e.g. to the name of the college) which need to be made?

Don't

- Repeat
- Praise the institution

- Use unusual language. This is pretentious and irritating. Express yourself naturally.
- Have someone else write your essay: it's dishonest and counterproductive. It is, however, acceptable to have input from others.

Check college office for tips!

FOR ALL STATEMENTS/ESSAYS

Be reader friendly: type, paragraph properly, grammar-check/spell-check/proof-read, use appropriate sized font (12), and if you are attaching it to a form, indicate your name, the college name, and the nature of this piece (personal statement/essay, etc.) There is no spelling facility in the "Apply" UCAS system, so prepare in Word first, and then paste.

Consider Readability: aim for one coherent unit, not a choppy set of sentences.

Know the college you're applying to (esp. for US): the more you have researched the college, the more convincing you will be. For the UK know **the course** and communicate something of what it means to you.

Use **specific** anecdotes/**specific** examples/**specific** facts to convey your qualities: poor applicants enumerate adjectives or list achievements.

Let your **personality** come through—have a friend and stranger read your statement and revise if necessary.

13. SCHOLARSHIPS

Many schools offer scholarships but these are not guaranteed!

Some look at your application holistically so find your fit!

USA Schools below are relatively generous once a student meets their requirements.

Agnes Scott College (w)

Amherst

Bard College

Barnard (w)

Bennington

Bates

Boston Conservatory (nca)

Bowdoin

Brandeis University

Brown

Bucknell

Bryn Mawr (w)

Carleton

Chicago Art Institute

Chicago University

Claremont McKenna

Clark University

Colby

Colgate

College of the Atlantic

College of the Holy Cross

College of Idaho

Colorado College

Columbia

Connecticut College

Cornell U

Dartmouth

Davidson

Denison

Duke

Earlham

University of Florida (nca)

Franklin & Marshall

Georgetown (nca)

Gettysburg

Grinnell

Harvard

Hood

Johns Hopkins

Kalamazoo

Kenyon College

Lake Forest

Lehigh University

Lewis & Clark

Luther College

Macalester

Methodist (NC) (nca)

University of Michigan

Middlebury

MIT

Mount Holyoke (w)

New York University

UNC at Chapel Hill (nca)

Northwestern University

College of Notre Dame of

Maryland

Oberlin

Occidental

Oklahoma University

Pitzer

Pomona

Princeton

UPENN

Randolph Macon College

Reed

Richmond

Ringling College of Art

Rochester University

Sarah Lawrence

Savannah College of Art &
Design

St. Lawrence

St. Olaf

San Francisco Art Institute
(nca)

Scripps College (w)

St. Johns College

Skidmore

Smith (w)

Stanford

Swarthmore

Trinity

Tufts

UC Berkeley

Union

Vassar

Virginia, University of

Wartburg

Washington & Lee

Wellesley (w)

Wesleyan University

Westminster

Wheaton

Whitman

Williams

Yale

Note:

nca = not commonapp

w = womens

See the following websites for more information on scholarships:

www.davisUWCscholars.org, www.ecis.org, www.isoa.org, www.finaid.org
www.internationalstudent.com,

There are many other scholarships available to international students in the US above and beyond the Davis program. For example, the Morehead Cain at UNC, the Robertson at Duke, the Jefferson at UVA and the **Mastercard** Program at a dozen or so of the best universities in North America and elsewhere. Do some research! Let me know if you wish to be nominated by the end of term 2 for these very competitive merit scholarships! (You will need 40+ points and for Mastercard you would need to be on a full bursary here).

Canadian Scholarships:

All of these require the nominated students to complete additional forms before they leave GHA. Most are aimed at high financial need students. Please see me before the end of term 2 if you are interested in being nominated by the school.

1. Trent International Program scholarships

Trent International Program (TIP) offers a limited number of highly competitive renewable full and tuition scholarships.

2. Trent University

Criteria: High academic achievement, outstanding record of extracurricular contributions and leadership, and an assessment of financial need. Students must be nominated by the school. (36+ points required)

3. University of Victoria

A four-year scholarship for an undergraduate degree valued at Canadian \$80,000. Candidate is nominated by his/her school. 34+ points required.

4. Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada

5. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada

This university has an International Leader of Tomorrow Award plus others. The purpose of this award is to provide access to the University for outstanding international students who have shown great leadership and do not have the economic means to study at the post-secondary level. One nomination per school is allowed.

6. York University

Africa Scholarships valued at \$25,000 per year. 36+ points required. Africa Scholarships.

7. University of Toronto

Full International scholarship. 39+ points required

European Scholarships:

Sciences Po - France

Visited GHA for past 2 years and seem keen to increase their international student body by offering financial aid to international applicants – see www.sciencespo.fr/en

'Studienstiftung'

German nationals should acquaint themselves with the opportunities created by the 'Studienstiftung': email: sdv@studienstiftung.de or write to Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes, Mirbachstrasse, 7, 53173 Bonn.

University College

Utrecht University (Netherlands) offers substantial though not 100% scholarships to outstanding students nominated by their schools who are subsequently accepted. See the website: www.ucu.uu.nl

Jacobs University – Bremen (Germany)

Visited RWANDA in 2016 and does have an international scholarship fund

The first thing you should do is to contact your own Ministry of Education(MINEDUC), which will have details of most schemes that could support deserving students. You should also contact British Council office, which should have details of scholarship schemes.

Good sources of on-line scholarship information:

British Council Education UK site: www.educationuk.org, Refer to www.britishcouncil.org/education/funding

www.scholarship-search.org.uk –

This has listings of undergraduate awards (many listed are not substantial). The ACU (Association of Commonwealth Universities) web site - www.acu.ac.uk has useful information on the awards they offer.

Scholarships in Asia

There are international scholarships available at a number of Universities in Asia including Yale-NUS in Singapore, NYU Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong University, Asia Pacific University in Japan, Taiwanese Universities and a new women's University in Bangladesh.

14. KEEPING IN TOUCH AND FEEDBACK

Lastly, many of you will be receiving your offers after you've left GHA. Whilst it is true that many colleges tell us which GHA students they have accepted, we do not **always** know: and often we are not sure which places were taken up. Please let the school know which school you finally decide to attend. Also, if we have records, we are in a better position to guide students in years to come.

It is polite of course to thank referees and let them know where you are headed: a brief email is appreciated.

Please do let me know how you are getting along on **careers@greenhillsacademy.rw** If you discover useful information (websites etc.), which were not included in this handbook, then please inform us so that we can improve future editions.

WHO TAKES WHICH RESPONSIBILITY?

With US/Canada/New Zealand/Australia University application forms, you are responsible for sending the following to your institutions (generally online!):

- Application form
- Any supplementary form/s
- Essays
- SAT results if appropriate
- Financial aid forms: these often, though not always, have a later deadline
- Anything else requested by the institution

You are responsible for sending all of the above together to the institution. It is advisable to check the documents have arrived safely. I am responsible for sending the following:

- Teacher References/Evaluations
- School Transcripts/records (Secondary School Report etc.)
- Predicted Grades
- TOEFL waiver letter
- Fee waiver if appropriate (you must come in person request this from me in Term 2):
- School profile
- IBO Course description letter