

# Applying to US universities



Understanding the system to apply strategically

Make the destination part of your education

# David Hawkins

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The UK's only Certified  
Educational Planner, held  
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worldwide .

Helped hundreds of  
students gain admission  
to US universities

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# Early Admissions



Celebrating our students'  
successes with 100+ offers from:

**Bocconi**  
**Columbia**  
**Cornell**  
**Dartmouth**  
**Georgetown**  
**IE University**  
**Liverpool (Vet)**  
**NYU Tisch**  
**Rice**  
**Tufts**  
**Yale**  
**and more...**

**Interview invitations:**  
**Cambridge**  
**Oxford**  
**UK Medical Schools**



[theuniversityguys.com](http://theuniversityguys.com)

# Congratulations to our class of 2025



- |                              |                            |                              |                          |                                   |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Aberdeen                     | Emory                      | Marist University            | SCAD                     |                                   |
| American University of Paris | Erasmus University College | McGill                       | Seton Hall               |                                   |
| Aston                        | ESADE                      | Michigan                     | Sheffield                |                                   |
| Bangor                       | ESCP                       | Michigan State               | SOAS                     |                                   |
| Bath                         | Exeter                     | Navarra                      | Southampton              | UC San Diego                      |
| Bocconi                      | Fordham                    | Newcastle                    | Southampton Solent       | UC Santa Barbara                  |
| Boston College               | Forward College            | Northeastern                 | SP Jain London           | UC Santa Cruz                     |
| Boston University            | Georgia Tech               | Northeastern London          | St Andrews               | UCL                               |
| Bristol                      | Goldsmiths                 | Nottingham Trent             | St Mary's                | UCLA                              |
| British Columbia             | Greenwich                  | NYU                          | SUNY Binghamton          | UNC Chapel Hill                   |
| Brown                        | Harvard                    | Occidental                   | Surrey                   | University College Dublin         |
| Brunel                       | IE University              | Oxford                       | Sussex                   | University of Arizona             |
| Cal Berkeley                 | IED Barcelona              | Oxford Brookes               | Swansea                  | University of Georgia             |
| Carnegie Mellon              | Indiana Bloomington        | Penn                         | Syracuse                 | University of Southern California |
| Case Western Reserve         | John Cabot                 | Plymouth                     | Tampa                    | University of the Arts            |
| Chapman                      | Kent                       | Pomona                       | Toulouse Business School | University of Toronto             |
| Chester                      | King's College London      | Purdue                       | Trinity College Dublin   | University of Vermont             |
| City St George's             | Kingston                   | Queen Mary                   | TU Eindhoven             | UT Austin                         |
| College of William & Mary    | Lancaster                  | Queen Mary University, Malta | Tulane                   | Vassar                            |
| Connecticut College          | LCI Barcelona              | Reading                      | U Florida                | Villanova                         |
| Creative Arts                | Leeds                      | Regent's                     | U of East Anglia         | Wake Forest                       |
| Dartmouth                    | Loughborough               | Roehampton                   | U South Florida          | Warwick                           |
| Derby                        | Loyola Marymount           | Rollins College              | U Virginia               | Washington University, St Louis   |
| Drexel                       | LSE                        | Royal Holloway               | U Wisconsin-Madison      | Wesleyan                          |
| Durham                       | LUISS                      | San Diego State              | UC Davis                 | Williams                          |
| Eckerd                       | Lynn                       | Santa Clara                  | UC Irvine                | Worcester                         |
| Edinburgh                    | Maastricht                 |                              | UC Merced                | Yale                              |
| EHL                          | Manchester                 |                              | UC Riverside             | York                              |
|                              | Manchester Metropolitan    |                              |                          |                                   |



# Our Agenda

- Is the US right for you? Understanding the fundamental differences
- How US applications actually work
- Common pitfalls students and families face—and how to avoid them
- Resources to help you navigate this process
- *We are not here to convince you that the US is better than the UK, pressure you to apply anywhere and pretend that this is the right choice for anyone*



# The Opportunity

- The UK has roughly 130 universities. The US has over 4,000**

That's not just more options—it represents fundamentally different teaching models and academic structures

- Different systems create different opportunities**

Liberal arts education, research universities, technical institutes, and specialized colleges offer unique pathways

- Thousands of UK students navigate this system every year**

The difference between those who succeed and those who struggle? Understanding how the system actually works

**Understanding the system is your competitive advantage**

# Why UK students succeed



US universities actively recruit international students like you



## Academic Preparation

Deep subject knowledge from A Levels



## Intellectual Maturity

Focused study develops genuine expertise



## Global Perspective

The international experience universities value



## Independence

Your demonstrated ability to navigate complex systems

# Student testimonials:

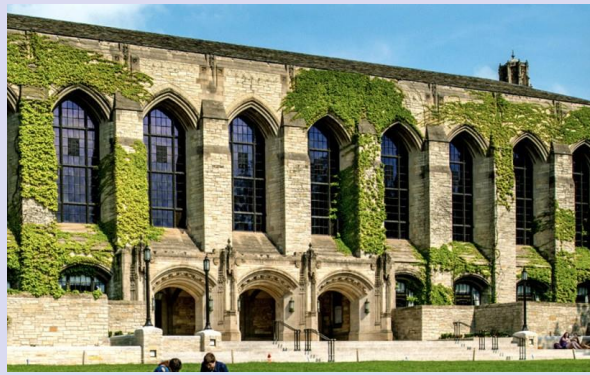
## Thomas at Yale

"I loved Physics, History, and Music equally. At Oxford I'd have to pick one. At Yale, I'm majoring in Physics but still taking courses in the others."



## Priya at Northwestern

"I thought I wanted Engineering. After taking Philosophy and Economics courses, I realized I'm more interested in policy. That flexibility saved me."



## Sophie at Williams

"I wanted a small college where professors know me. I have 12 people in most of my classes and I'm doing research as a first-year."



## Know what you are applying for

### Curriculum

Model  
Teaching style  
Subjects  
Structures



### Identity

Values  
Missions  
Politics | Religion



### Campus Life

Size  
Residency  
Activities



# How to get into America's top universities

### Academics

Subject interests  
Curiosity  
Experiences



### Identity

Values  
Qualities  
Passions, Goals  
Things that have shaped you



### Experiences

Experiences  
Achievements  
Skills  
Life Events



## Know what you want to show

# Where students struggle



Let's address the four most common pitfalls we see families encounter during the US application process. The good news? These are all avoidable with proper planning and research. The bad news? Most families don't realize they're making these mistakes until it's too late.

## ✗ Starting too late

**The mistake:** Beginning research in September of Year 13

**The consequence:** No time for strategic planning, profile development, or thoughtful essay writing

**How to avoid:** Start exploring options in Year 11 and begin serious research during Year 12

## ✗ Applying only to famous names

**The mistake:** Only applying to Harvard, Yale, Stanford, MIT, and other household names

**The consequence:** No acceptances because the list lacks balance across selectivity levels

**How to avoid:** Research fit carefully and build a balanced list that includes reach, target, and likely schools

## ✗ Writing generic essays

**The mistake:** Submitting essays that could apply to any university without modification

**The consequence:** Applications fail to demonstrate genuine interest or university-specific research

**How to avoid:** Understand each university's specific culture, values, and what makes them unique

## ✗ Misunderstanding holistic admissions

**The mistake:** Believing strong grades alone are sufficient for admission

**The consequence:** Academically excellent students submit weak overall applications

**How to avoid:** Develop an authentic extracurricular profile over time that shows depth and genuine passion

These are all completely avoidable with proper guidance. Strong students hurt their own chances through mistakes that proper planning prevents.



# College in the USA is different

It's a bit like football





It's a different game  
and you need  
to know the  
rules



# Three Core Differences

UK v USA

## What you apply to

**UK:** You apply to a specific course  
(Economics at LSE, French at Bristol).

**USA:** You are apply to University or  
college within university (e.g.,  
"Northwestern" or "Penn Engineering")

**Implication:** Application strategy and  
essays change dramatically

## Different processes

**The UK:** Fixed deadlines, standard  
processes, clear timelines

**The USA:** Multiple deadlines, different  
admissions systems, individualized  
requirements.

**Implications:** You need to build your  
list of universities before you can plan  
what approach to follow.

## How you're evaluated

**The UK:** Admissions is primarily  
academic (grades, personal statement,  
references).

**The USA:** Admissions looks at the  
whole person (holistic) looking at  
academics & extracurriculars.

**Implications:** Building your  
competitive profile takes time and  
consideration.



Lee Coffin, Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Dartmouth College: "Admissions Beat," podcast March 2023

## Academic Fit

- › Grade Eligibility
- › Capacity to cope
- › Desire to challenge yourself
- › Writing Ability
- › Core/G. Ed Program
- › Teaching styles



# FIT



What does it really mean?



## Community Fit

- › Motivation Levels
- › Residential Life
- › Extra-curriculars
- › Values
- › Missions
- › Religious
- › Political

## Class Fit

- › Personality
- › Character
- › How you will combine with the rest of the admitted students





# Academic structures

- Are you applying to a university with only one undergraduate college?
- Are you applying to a university with two-four undergraduate colleges?
- Are you applying to a university with many undergraduate colleges or where you apply to a specific major?
- Are you applying into a niche programme?

*This isn't trivia—it fundamentally affects how you research universities and write your essays. You need to understand what you're actually applying to.*

# How it works

<b>Freshman (Y1)</b>	<b>Sophomore (Y2)</b>	<b>Junior (Y3)</b>	<b>Senior (Y4)</b>
Humanities	Humanities	Major	Major
Social Sciences	English	Major	Major
English	Elective	Major	Major
Foreign Language	Elective	Major	Elective
Elective	Major	Elective	Elective
Science	Social Services	Major	Major
English	Science	Major	Major
Maths	Major	Major	Major
Foreign Language	Elective	Elective	Elective
Major	Elective	Elective	Elective

## Standard Curriculum

**1/3 time on** General Ed, Distribution, writing, quantitative skills, including humanities, arts and PE.

## Open Curriculum

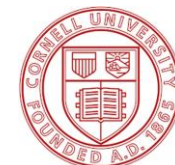
**100% your choice** of courses, no required classes

## Structured Curriculum

**Common set** of classes every undergraduate takes regardless of your intended major

## Specialised Curriculum

**Required courses are dependent on your major,** but will still include some classes outside your main subject interest



# Open Curriculum



BROWN

## Graduation Requirements

- Students must earn a minimum of 30-course credits
- Complete the requirements for at least one concentration
- Demonstrate writing competence

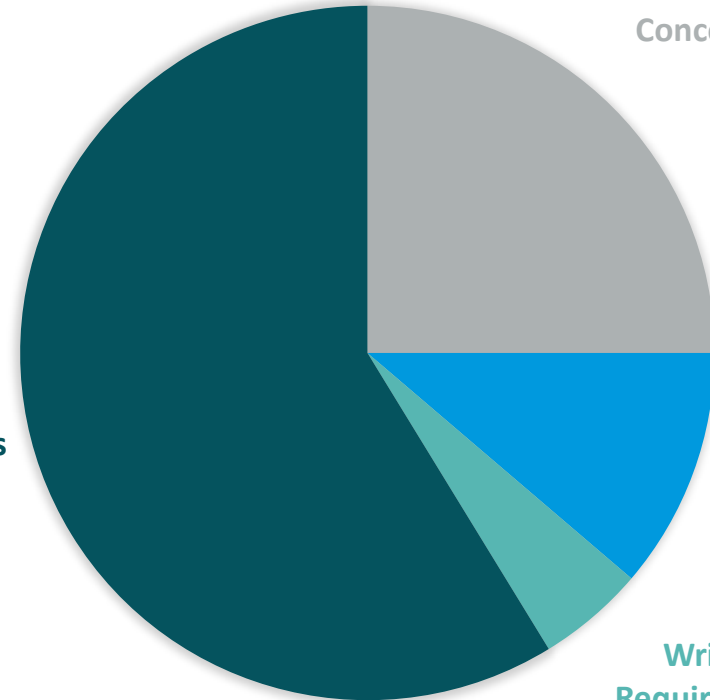
BA

Electives  
59%

History  
Concentration  
25%

Intercultural  
Competence  
Certificate  
11%

Writing  
Requirements  
5%



## General Institute Requirements

- › 6 Science classes including at least 1 from each of Chemistry, Physics, Maths and Biology
- › 2 Restricted Electives in Science and Technology
- › 12 units of Labs
- › 4 Physical education and wellness classes
- › Pass swimming requirement

## HASS Requirement

- › 8 classes across the Humanities arts and social sciences including
  - › 1 Humanities class
  - › 1 Arts Class
  - › 1 Social Sciences Class
  - › Concentration of at least 3 classes
  - › 2 communication intensive classes
  - › Additional electives if wished

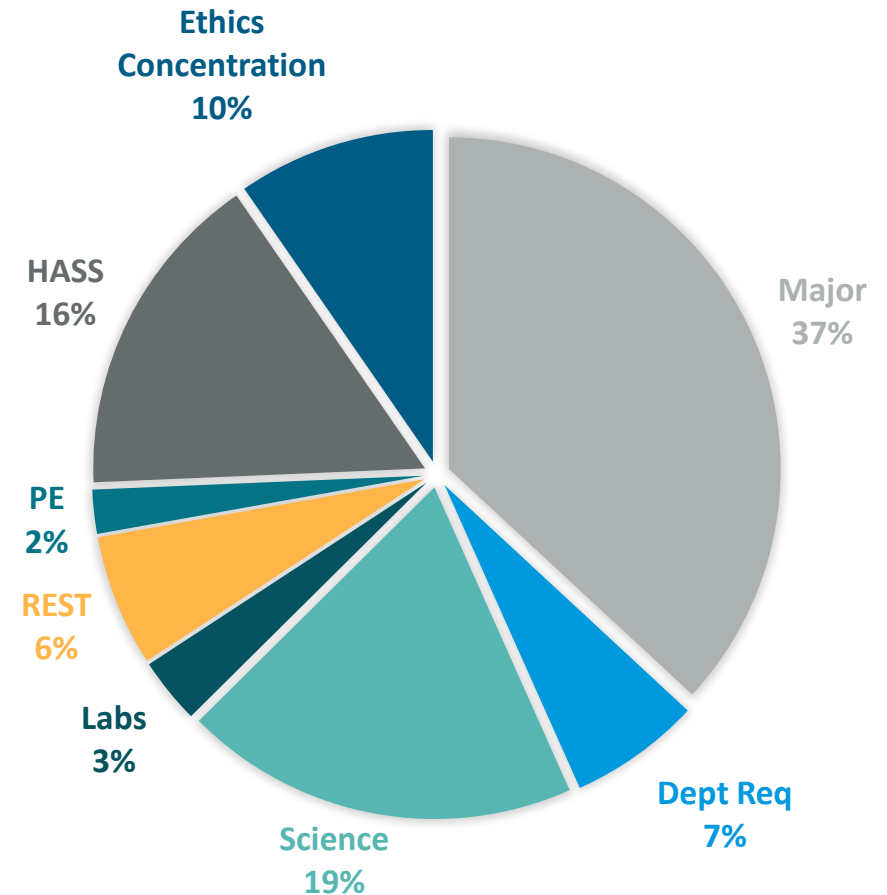
## Departmental Requirements

- › 2 Communication intensive classes

# Standard Curriculum



## Mathematics With Computer Science BS



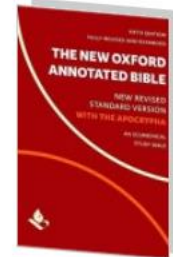
# Fixed Curriculum

## Fixed Classes

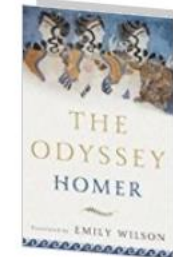
- Masterpieces of Western Literature and Philosophy II
- Contemporary Civilization
- Masterpieces of Western Art
- Masterpieces of Western Music
- Frontiers of Science



**The Iliad**  
Homer



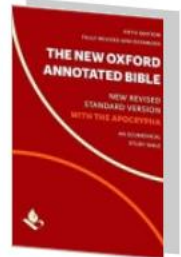
**Genesis**  
Unknown



**The Odyssey**  
Homer



**If Not, Winter,  
Fragments of  
Sappho**  
Sappho



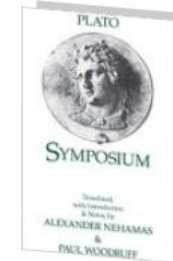
**Job**  
Unknown



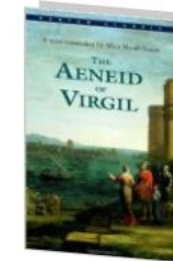
**Oresteia**  
Aeschylus



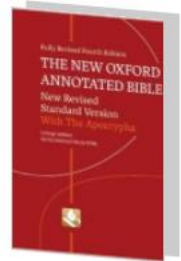
**Father Comes Home  
From the Wars**



**The Symposium**  
Plato



**The Aeneid**  
Virgil



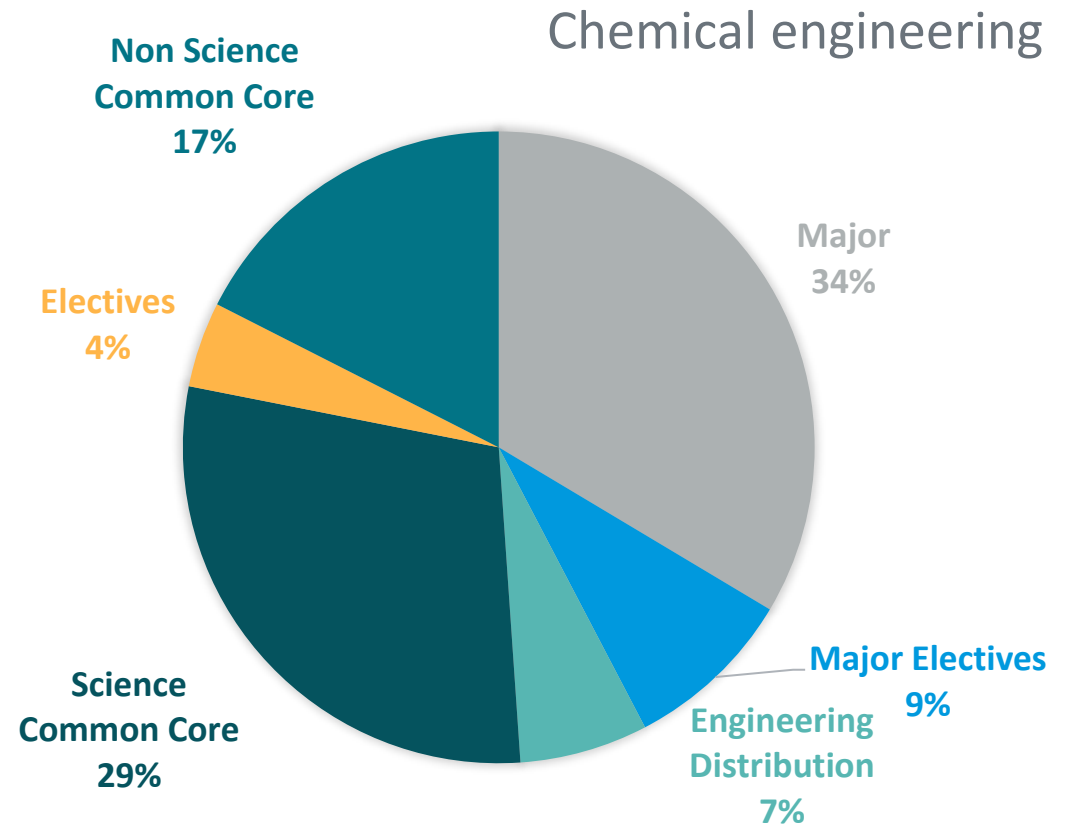
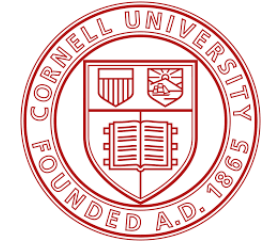
**Luke/John**  
Unknown

Each major within the School of Engineering has its own curriculum with requirements within the major and outside it.

### Engineering Common Curriculum

- Maths 14-16 credits
- Physics 8 credits
- Chemistry 4-8 credits
- Fourth Science (specified by major) 3-4 credits
- First Year writing Seminar 6 credits
- Computing 4 Credits
- Engineering Distribution 9-12 credits
- Liberal Studies distribution 18 credits
- An engineering communications course
- Two semesters of Physical Education
- Proficiency in swimming

# Specialised Curriculum



# University Culture



# University culture: spot the difference



## From USC

What is your favourite snack?

Dream trip?

Best movie of all time?

What TV show will you binge watch next?

Dream job?

Favorite book?

If your life had a theme song, what would it be?

Which well-known person or fictional character would be your ideal roommate?

## From Yale

What inspires you?

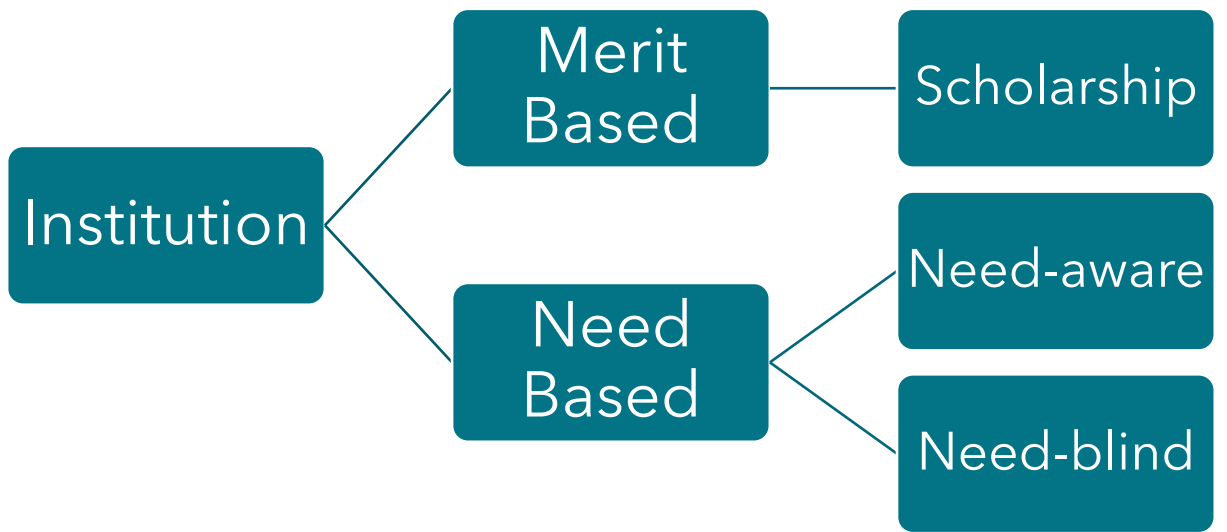
You are teaching a new Yale course. What is it called?

Yale's residential colleges host conversations with guests.

What person, past or present, would you invite to speak?

What would you ask them to discuss?

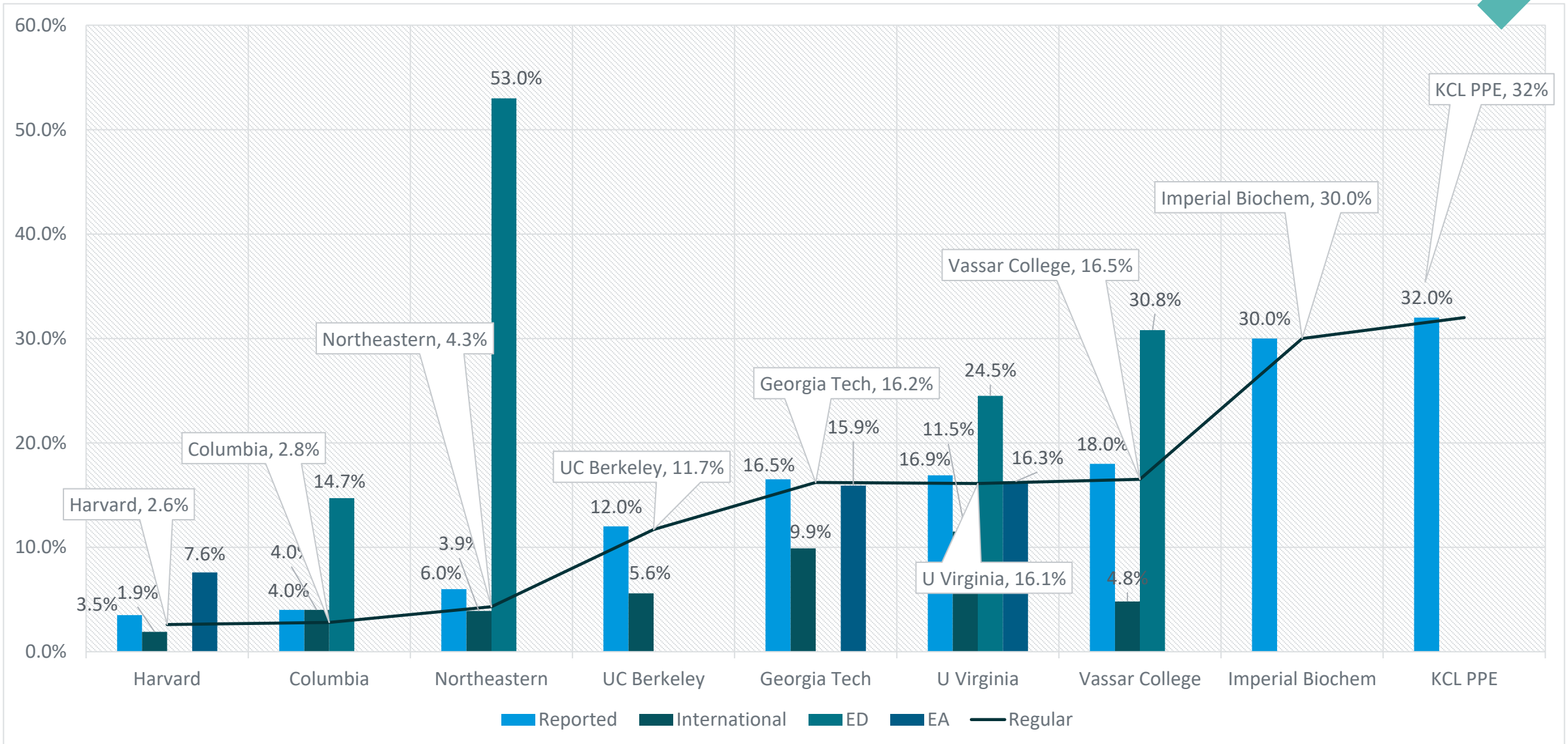
What is something about you that is not included anywhere else in your application?



# Money

- Scholarships may have a separate application process and/or earlier deadline
- The cost of tuition, accommodation and living varies a lot

# Competition



# The need for strategy

Top universities are highly selective beyond what we see with UK universities.

But thousands of international students are admitted each year

Early Decision rates are typically 2-3x higher than Regular Decision

It's all about having a clear "pitch" to universities

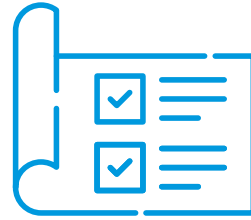
**Low acceptance rates don't mean impossible: they mean strategy matters**

# Our methodology



## Explore

Stop researching randomly—focus on real matches



## Prepare

Build applications strategically, not frantically



## Apply

Submit applications you're genuinely proud of



# Resources for you

## FREE GUIDE



Our emailed guides that cover the processes for different countries and systems in depth.



## FREE CALL



**A free 30-minute call to discuss your specific situation and goals**

No obligation, no pressure.

Genuine advice whether we work together or no

## OUR SERVICES



Our strategic planning and university selection guidance

Essay coaching and holistic application strategy

Ongoing support throughout the entire process

# Our services

These case studies demonstrate what strategic positioning actually delivers. But methodology alone isn't enough—execution matters. You have two clear paths forward, each designed for different family circumstances and preferences.

## Explore Independently

### My University Guides Online Course, coming soon!

#### What You Get:

- Our complete methodology—the same framework we use with private clients
- Self-paced video modules
- Application templates and resources
- Created by the UK's only Certified Educational Planner

**Perfect for:** Families who want to explore thoroughly before deciding on hands-on support

## Hands-On Support

### Comprehensive Guidance Packages

Starting with a **FREE consultation**

#### What You Get:

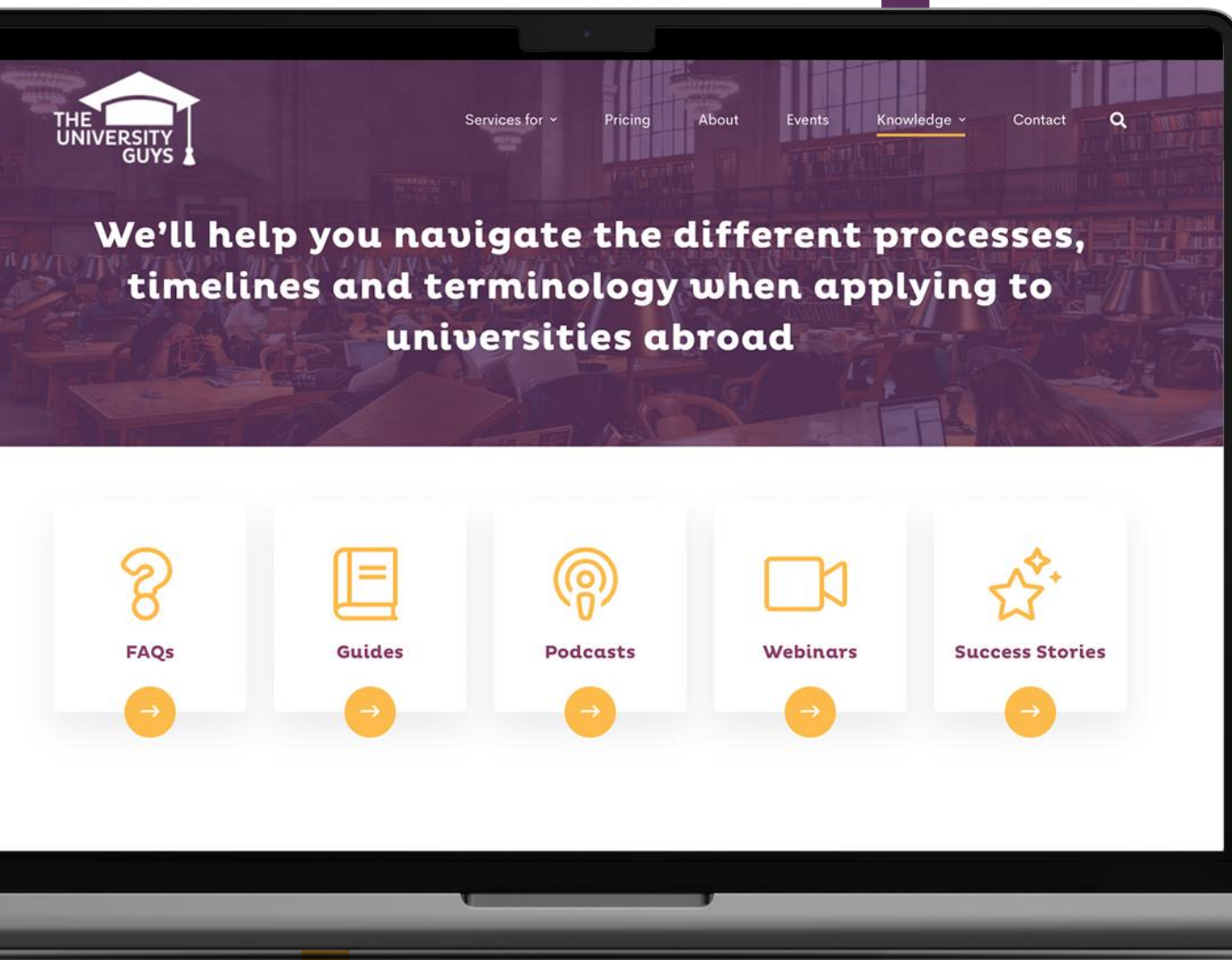
- Personalised strategy developed with your family
- Direct access to our expertise throughout the process
- Strategic positioning like Mary and Marcus received
- Support from application to enrolment

**Perfect for:** Families ready for expert guidance now

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*"I can't thank you enough. At the start of this process, G did not have any definite direction. Thankfully with all your guidance and expertise he was fortunate to receive a number of university offers. I have to attribute this to your approach in finding the university which was the 'right-fit'."*

– Parent, student admitted to universities in the UK, USA and Canada



## Questions and next steps?

[www.theuniversityguys.com/begin](http://www.theuniversityguys.com/begin)

