



Ocean Educational Consulting

Guide for Students with Special Circumstances

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Considerations for Athletes

If you are a strong athlete and want to play your sport when you get to college, you have some additional preparation for your application. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has three different divisions for which over 800 colleges participate. NCAA Divisions I and II include schools that are the most athletically competitive. Division I schools are generally considered to be more athletically and academically competitive than Division II schools. But both Division I and Division II schools tend to offer athletic scholarships. (Division I Ivy League schools are an exception to this rule and they do not grant scholarships to athletes.) Division III schools, on the other hand, tend to be more competitive academically, yet less competitive in terms of athletics. You can find a list of a NCAA schools and their divisions at www.ncaa.org.

If you are thinking of playing your sport at Division I and Division II schools, there are a few things you will have to do. First, you need to visit the NCAA website and read about recruitment policies for the schools you are interested in attending. Also, check out the rules governing eligibility. You also need to register at the NCAA Eligibility Center, where you fill out a questionnaire about your grades, test scores, and graduation date. They also require you to pay a fee or submit a fee waiver. Second, you should look at the website of each school to which you are applying and examine their eligibility policy.

If you have the athletic talent to be recruited by Division I and Division II schools, you will generally be contacted by coaches from those colleges and universities. The NCAA does not allow coaches to contact prospective students until after they have completed their junior year of high school. You should not wait until then, however, to contact schools you are interested in applying to. Make sure that you follow the guidelines regarding recruitment that appear on the NCAA website. If you visit colleges you are thinking about applying to, you should ask coaches if they have any say in the admissions decisions for athletes. To make yourself most competitive, it's important to be academically and athletically strong.

If you are recruited to play a sport at Division I and Division II schools and you are offered an athletic scholarship, you will be asked to sign a national letter of intent. This is a binding agreement between you and the school in which you promise to enroll. You'll also receive a scholarship agreement. If you do not enroll at the college after you sign the letter of intent, you can face a hefty penalty. For information on this, check out the NCAA website. Only students who receive a scholarship offer will have to sign a letter of intent.

If you are offered an athletic scholarship at Division I and Division II schools, make sure that you read the fine print very carefully. While certain sports—mainly football and basketball—tend to provide full scholarships, many other sports only offer partial funding. If you do receive a scholarship, it is important to remember that these awards are not guaranteed. Moreover, they are renewed annually. You generally learn if your scholarship has been renewed in the summer before the school year starts. In addition, you may also need to fill out the FAFSA form to take advantage of other types of financial aid. Make sure you do not miss the deadline.

Since Division III schools do not provide scholarships for athletes, there tends to be less recruitment at Division III schools. So, if you are interested in playing a sport at one of these colleges, you should contact the coach to discuss prospects in joining the team. Although Division III schools do not provide athletic scholarships, they may still provide need-based financial aid.

Tips for International Students

International students at American colleges have increased exponentially in recent years. In 2010, for example, over 700,000 international students were enrolled at American universities. The U.S. universities with the highest number of international students are University of Southern California, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and New York University. Yet smaller and less well-known colleges have also recently begun to recruit international students in high numbers.

American schools tend to want international students for two key reasons. First, colleges are looking to expand the diversity of their campuses by including students from all over the world. Second, the recent recession has decimated public spending on state universities. As a result, many state schools are recruiting international students, who pay higher international fees.

If you are an international student interested in applying to an American college, you can essentially follow the same plan in this book. The primary difference for international students and American citizens applying to American colleges is that international students have fewer options for financial aid.

International students, like American ones, should carefully research colleges and universities to determine which ones provide the best fit. In particular, international students should carefully research different campuses to determine if they will be happy when they arrive there. Conducting the virtual campus visits is absolutely crucial for international students because they may not have had the chance to visit American colleges in person.

International students will be expected to document their academic record just like American students. This will include providing official transcripts of grades and courses. Some American schools may also require official copies of diplomas or scores for national examinations. If your documents are not in English, they'll need to be translated and certified or notarized. Most colleges have international student offices where they are familiar with the different schooling systems and academic credentials from around the world. Some schools will require you to have your grades converted to an American-style GPA. Pay careful attention to each college's requirements regarding your academic record.

In addition to your grades and transcripts, international students will generally also need to take the SAT or ACT and submit their scores. Make sure that you carefully examine the test requirements for each school to which you are applying. Make sure that you sign up for these tests very early. The SAT and ACT may not be offered frequently in different countries and it is important to make sure that you can take them in time to complete your application.

To make sure that you are able to write and speak in English, colleges will require you to pass a test to demonstrate your proficiency. If you are from a country that does not use English, American colleges will generally require you to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or the Pearson Test of English (PTE).

Financial aid for international students may be more difficult to come by. International students are not eligible to receive federal loans or grants, nor money from states. As a result, they are only eligible to receive private scholarship money. Some colleges do provide private scholarships to international students and, in fact, some private colleges have recently tried to recruit strong foreign students with offers of financial aid. If you want to apply for financial aid, you will need to complete either the CSS financial aid profile application or the international student financial aid application. These forms are available at www.collegeboard.org. For more information about which schools provide aid to international students, take a look at <http://www.edupass.org>.

If you are not going to apply for financial aid, many schools will require you to certify that you are able to pay the full cost of tuition, fees, supplies, and room and board. This is done with a form often referred to as the International Student Affidavit of Financial Support. For information about financial certification, refer to each school's application requirements for foreign students.

While American schools are trying to increase international enrollment, many have decided to use local agents to represent these colleges and universities overseas. These agents are hired as independent contractors who are paid a certain amount for each student they recruit to a college. In recent years, the number of international recruiting agents have skyrocketed. At the same time, use of such agents has sparked tremendous controversy.

Critics of international agents argue that the recruiters often do not act in the best interests of students. They argue that agents are paid to recruit as many students as possible and, as a result, agents don't care about finding the right school for each student. Moreover, some critics argue that some agents are unethical, as evidenced by some cases of agents forging admissions materials. On the other hand, those who support the use of agents to recruit international students argue that these agents are indispensable in helping international students navigate American college admissions. In particular, proponents of using agents say that they can help students because they speak the same language and know how the country's education system works.

¹Beth McMurtrie, "International Enrollments at US Colleges Grow But Still Rely on China," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 14, 2011.

²"US Institutions with the Most International Students," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 14, 2011.

Undocumented Students

Undocumented students—many of whom were brought to the U.S. when very young—are allowed to attend college in the United States. Generally speaking, public schools are more likely to accept undocumented students than private colleges. A 2011 study done by the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good at the University of Michigan found that over one-third of public colleges and one-fifth of private schools had policies governing enrollment of undocumented students. Some states—Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina—deny admission to public universities for undocumented students. If you are undocumented, you will need to carefully research which schools you are eligible to attend. If you live in a state that bans admission to its state schools, you will need to look into a private college or a public school in a different state.

Getting financial aid is a bit more complicated for undocumented students. You are not eligible for federal financial aid programs. Additionally, many states do not allow you to apply for state funds. Only about 29% of public schools provide institutional financial aid to undocumented students. At the same time, 57% of private colleges provide some financial assistance to undocumented students. At state schools, twelve grant in-state tuition to undocumented students (California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin) and three states (Illinois, New Mexico, and Texas) offer state-based financial aid. On the other hand, five states deny in-state tuition to undocumented students residing in the state (Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, and South Carolina).

If you are undocumented, you will need to carefully research the policies for undocumented students at the colleges that you are interested in attending. Specifically, you need to determine if they accept undocumented students, what types of financial aid—if any—are available, and what their general policies are towards undocumented students.

³"The Patchwork of State Policies on Undocumented Students," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 1, 2011.

⁴Kelly Field, "Public Colleges Are More Likely to Admit Undocumented Students Than Private Colleges," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 17, 2011.

⁵"The Patchwork of State Policies on Undocumented Students," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 1, 2011.

Guidance for Artists

If you are interested in attending a highly selective arts program—music, theater, film, art, or dance—you will need to audition or submit samples of your artistic work to the college. There is a fair amount of variation in how selective different programs in the arts are. Some highly specialized schools like the Berklee College of Music, for example, only accept the most talented musicians and vocalists. On the other hand, many small liberal arts schools as well as top research universities also have strong and highly competitive arts programs. Different programs have different admissions requirements in terms of showcasing your artistic talent. Make sure that you carefully review each school's application requirements before you begin to prepare your final application.

Generally speaking, if you are interested in attending a school where you will major in the arts, you will have to demonstrate a high level of artistic talent. As you complete your applications to these programs, you have to demonstrate—through your portfolio, auditions, or interviews—a high level of artistic accomplishment. To complete your application, you will need to include significant evidence of your talent.

On the other hand, some students may not want to major in the arts, but they may want to include their artistic capabilities in their application for admission. The rules for this differ by college. Some schools will accept supplementary materials that showcase your artistic talents even if you do not plan to major in the arts. Other schools, however, will not accept arts materials unless you plan to pursue a major in your artistic field. Make sure that you understand the requirements and expectations for each of your college applications.

The Common Application includes an entire arts supplement that allows you to include your portfolio. This supplemental application will allow you to submit your artistic materials for review. Pay careful attention to the instructions, however. While some schools ask you to send samples of your work to the admission's office, others expect you to submit them to the appropriate academic department. Some schools also require you to attend an in-person audition and you will need to coordinate your travel plans around the potential dates for these auditions. If you do use the Common Application's Arts Supplement, you must also include a letter of recommendation from a teacher that has instructed you in your artistic endeavor.

Other schools with strong arts programs use forms other than the Common Application. Make sure that you understand which application form each school uses. Some art schools and conservatories ask students to apply using the Unified Application for Music and Performing Arts. Additionally, other schools may have a supplemental art application in addition to their own college application. Carefully read the directions for their requirements.

For students interested in pursuing a major in the arts, your submitted materials will be reviewed by faculty members in your artistic field. The faculty who review your portfolio or view your audition complete an assessment report that is forwarded to the admissions office. This assessment is placed in your file along with your other application materials, including transcripts, test scores, and admissions essay.

If you have any questions about how to submit your portfolio to any particular college, simply e-mail or call the schools admissions office.

Advice for Homeschoolers

In the past twelve years, the number of homeschooled kids in the U.S. has increased dramatically. According to the Department of Education's National Center for Education statistics, there are over 1.5 million homeschooled students. A survey of homeschooling parents revealed that many of them choose to homeschool for moral or religious reasons. In the past few years, however, there has been a spike in the number of parents who homeschool because they are fed up with standardized testing and curriculum.

The trickiest part of college applications for homeschoolers is dealing with grades and transcripts. Although your parents can provide you with grades and there are services that you can use to create a transcript, colleges prefer to see how your performance in the classroom compares to other students. The easiest way to demonstrate your competence in your academic subjects is to take some traditional classes. This can be done in one of three ways: online classes, community college classes, or traditional high school classes. By having a transcript from one of these sources, the college admissions committee will have a better sense of how your academic performance compares to your peers.

It is also good idea to make sure the you take the SAT or ACT. In doing this, the college admissions committee can see how your academic preparation compares with other students taking the test. You should also consider taking some AP courses and exams. If you are adamant that you do not want to take standardized tests, however, then you should consider applying to schools that do not require the SAT or ACT for admission.

A third challenge that homeschoolers have in the college admissions process is getting letters of recommendation. Whoever is coordinating your homeschooling is also serving as your de facto guidance counselor, and may have to write a letter of recommendation for you. It is a really good idea, however, to seek out letters of recommendation from other sources. You could ask one of the instructors for your additional non-homeschooling classes. You can also ask someone who knows you from an outside activity, like a coach for a sport that you play, a supervisor for a volunteer job you do, or someone who can comment on your activities in the community.

⁶Top home-schooling reasons in 2007 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey, Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Students with Disabilities

Some college applicants may have physical disabilities, learning differences, or emotional challenges. In recent years, more and more students facing such challenges are heading off to college and, as a result, schools are increasingly attuned to the unique needs that some of their students have. The proportion of college students with any type of disability has grown to 11%, according to a 2009 report by the Government Accountability Office. As a result, many colleges provide extensive support for students with special needs. The level of services and accommodation does vary, however, from school to school. While some colleges make many efforts to accommodate those with special needs, other schools simply do just enough to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, which requires colleges and universities to provide a basic level of accessibility and accommodation—tutoring or extra time on exams—to students who document their need.

As you research schools that you might be interested in attending, it is important to find out about the resources that different colleges offer to students with your unique needs. If you are grappling with learning challenges, you need to determine what type of academic support is available. Take a look on the school's website and find out if there is a learning resource center. Figure out what its hours are and if it is run by students or a full-time professional staff. Ask if tutoring is available and if it is free or fee-based. Find out if there is special academic counseling for students with learning challenges and how you can access such counseling. For students dealing with emotional disabilities, find out about the counseling services at different colleges.

If you face physical challenges, it is important to determine how responsive the college is to those students with similar disabilities. Look on the college website and determine if there are classrooms available for those with physical challenges. What about the dorms? Are there special living arrangements for students with physical challenges? Find out about the campus's Office for Accessible Education. Also, ask about medical care options for students with physical challenges.

The other thing that students with these challenges must consider is whether or not to disclose their disability to the admissions committee. There is no hard and fast rule about disclosing a disability. Generally speaking, you should disclose the disability if it can help explain something on in the rest of your application. For example, if you have an amazing academic record but very low test scores due to a disability, it is important to explain the context for this anomaly. By the same token, if you have very strong academic record yet struggle with the learning challenge, you may not want to reveal this in your application because it is not particularly relevant. If you choose not to disclose your disability, make sure that you do talk to a representative from the campuses office for accessible education about any special accommodations that you may need before you show up on campus for your freshman year.

⁷Mary Beth Marklein, "Learning-disabled Students Get Firmer Grip on College," *USA Today*, October 18, 2011.

Help for Transfer Students

Many parents worry that their kids will get sidetracked if they attend community college. There are ways to prevent that, however. If you do choose to go to community college, it is imperative that you know exactly which classes you need to take in order to fulfill the transfer requirements. Oftentimes, these requirements are available on the community college website. Community colleges generally refer to these documents as “reciprocity agreements” or “articulation agreements.” Essentially, these forms tell you exactly what classes you need to take to be able to transfer to a four-year college. You will also need to maintain a minimum GPA. Check with your local community college for details.

The number of community college transfer students to four-year schools has skyrocketed recently, and the American Association of Community Colleges reports that 12.4 million students were enrolled in community colleges in the U.S. in 2008. And many of these students go on to top universities. In 2009, the University of California calculated that 30% of its graduates attended a community college prior to transferring to UC schools.

There are a few additional things to consider as a transfer student, however. It’s important for transfer students to articulate why they want to transfer to the new college. You should clearly state your reasons for wishing to transfer in your personal statement. Transfer applicants will also need to include the college academic transcripts in their application as well as letters of recommendation. The key difference is that your references should include college professors rather than high school teachers. Transfer students will also need to determine if they need to take one of the standardized tests in order to transfer. Some schools require this while others do not.

⁸Jeremy Hyman and Lynn Jacobs, “10 Tips for Transferring From Community College,” *U.S. News and World Report*, September 16, 2009.