

STUDY ABROAD

The right way to choose your university

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Choosing foreign universities to apply to can prove to be a tedious task. But it certainly doesn't have to be that way if you set specific guidelines about what it is that you value and seek in your university experience. As another enrollment season is coming around, here are a few pointers to get you started.

Don't rely on university rankings alone

When looking into which universities to apply to, there is a tendency to focus too much on rankings. We romanticise top-ranked universities to such a high degree that we fail to consider their shortcomings. Many of the aspects that the rankings system uses, e.g. citations and international outlook, might not be priorities to students. Moreover, the rankings are only reflective of a university in its entirety,

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not of the particular discipline that one might want to study. Since they do not take student satisfaction into account, it's also usually not indicative of the quality of life that one might have when attending university.

A better way to pick a university is by speaking to its current and past students on student forums and chats or going through students' blogs, vlogs, and reviews. Additionally, instead of looking into general rankings, it is a better idea to look into universities that are considered good for your particular major.

Consider the school size and class sizes

Different students thrive in different environments. While some might love the hustle and bustle of a large public university where each class houses hundreds of students at once, others prefer a more intimate setting for their education.

A smaller school size means you are more likely to see familiar faces as you go about your everyday life on campus while a large school can result in you never seeing the same stranger twice. The number of people in your classes and the student-to-teacher ratio should also be taken into account. It is only wise to weigh the pros and cons of both, and see if the schools you like can strike the sweet spot between the extremes.

Think about the ideal location, accommodations, and food options

When thinking of studying abroad, we immediately jump to the conclusion that we must go to the US, Australia, or Canada. We often fail to look into the hundreds of other universities that are located elsewhere that might be a good fit for us. More students are opting to go to Southeast Asian or European schools nowadays because of the wider range of opportunities there. Think about what kind of an institution you want to go to, and not what country you think you should be going to.

While a good acceptance rate and academics

might seem like a good reason to apply to a university, you might want to look closely at other things too. Your life doesn't begin and end inside the classroom. In fact, you'll probably spend most of your time outside of an academic setting. Think about what is more important to you – a city setting with vast, modern facilities or a quiet rural setting.

The condition of the student accommodations is also an important factor to consider. How many people do you see yourself living with? What amenities are offered in on-campus housing? Answer these questions before you decide on a university.

Career support is important

A university education is your stepping stone into the professional world. Career counselling services, co-op opportunities, or advisory services for further education are things that can prove to be crucial for your career.

Look closely at the curriculum

Some universities have a very strict curriculum, while others have a more open curriculum which focuses more on interdisciplinary teaching. If you're absolutely certain about your major and would prefer not to dabble in unrelated things, you can opt for the former. But if you are interested in exploring various subjects and aren't entirely sure about which area you want to study, an open curriculum might be a better option for you.

Adrita Zaima is an A level student.



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Are We Prioritising the Humanities Enough?

RUDAIBA MAHBUB

The studies of the humanities can be traced back to centuries. The spread of knowledge mainly started with an exploration of the world around us. An exploration of human nature, culture, society was critical in order to make sense of it all. Even so, our attention has shifted elsewhere.

In Bangladesh, all English medium schools have a set standard for the languages they offer (English and Bangla), but the teaching differs from school to school. However, subjects like history and geography are merely glossed over in grades three and seven. In the national curriculum, besides the languages, humanities are crammed under "Social Science", taught usually between grades six and ten.

While Bangladesh does have institutions and university departments dedicated to humanities subjects, the lack in the foundational level in these areas makes learning at such institutions very challenging.

Ereti Rhidil Rahman, a student at University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh (ULAB), says, "I am pursuing my major in English and Humanities, and minor in Media Studies and Journalism. Both streams require a good grasp on world history, but most students, including myself, have little to no prior knowledge regarding it."

In the face of the challenges, Sudeep Chakravarti, a journalist, author, professor, and the founder of the Center of South Asian Studies at ULAB, remains positive, "I do see many students in the university system who lack foundation in humanities and, perhaps more importantly, lack confidence to take initiatives, practise critical thinking, and hesitate to move beyond rote learning and the rigid direction of syllabi and instructors. All it takes to change this is space, opportunity, enabling, empowerment – and a gentle nudge."

To end on why humanities should be seen with higher regard, Sudeep Chakravarti, says, "I believe that whatever you learn or choose to specialise in, a 360-degree outlook is crucial to shape you fully as an individual. A businessperson will be hobbled without an active sense of history and politics, in a range from local to global. Liberal arts education seeks to provide this 360-degree engagement with humanities."

Rudaiba Mahbub is currently an undergrad student at ULAB.