

EDUCATION

How to make a university list



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WHEN APPLYING ABROAD

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One of the most crucial steps to succeeding in your university applications abroad is making a solid list. It is also one of the most overwhelming and confusing steps. Let's break it down.

Step 1: Start early

There's quite a bit to do. Depending on your country of choice, you may have different standardised testing requirements. In order to sit for all the tests on time, it is essential to have a rough idea of the countries where you'd like to apply at least a year or so in advance.

Once you start applying, there's going to be quite a lot of paperwork including but not limited to, tax returns, bank statements, and academic certifications. A lot of time will have to be set aside before the deadline, for you to receive the paperwork, and then for it to go through after you submit it.

Starting the process of sorting out your priorities and preferences early is more likely to end with you having better choices at the end of the application process. This can also lead to you going to a college that fits your priorities in multiple respects. However, if you find yourself close to the deadlines, the key then is to figure out your top priorities and list fewer colleges where you statistically have a more realistic chance of getting in.

Step 2: Make the big geographical decisions

Beyond personal preference, a factor to consider is the funds available to you for higher education. Based on this, compare the average cost of tuition and residence, scholarship and financial aid opportunities available in different countries. See whether or not you fulfil the requirements/criteria to obtain them and measure up to the competition.

Next, you should definitely consider what you would like to study and how that country fares in terms of teaching that discipline. Would you like to study a specialised program and only study your subject of choice from the very first day, as is often offered at universities in Asia and Europe, or would you like to

enter university and explore by taking courses across a range of disciplines before eventually declaring your major as is the system in the US?

If you intend to stay abroad after graduation, look at how career opportunities within that discipline measure up to those in other countries. Is the job market of the industry you'll be studying to enter flourishing in said country? How do salaries compare across different countries? Do they provide a good return on investment on the heightened international tuition fees you may be required to pay?

Finally, look at the situation with PR opportunities and how they may be sustained at the time of your graduation. What requirements would you have to fulfil? Would you have the necessary resources in terms of time and money to fulfil them after you graduate? Do other Bangladeshis with similar degrees succeed in getting that PR? Compare the answers to these questions across the countries you are considering.

Step 3: Zoom in on universities

Once you've chosen your country, it is time to choose the universities. The factors you should consider in this process will differ across countries. It could be helpful to start with some research on how each country evaluates applications and what they look for. For example, universities in the US generally look for applicants with "holistic" profiles, meaning applicants who present a well-balanced set of academic achievement, standardised test scores, extra-curricular involvement, and essays. In contrast, universities in the UK prioritise exam scores above all else and only look at activities and involvements related to your academic discipline of interest. In Canada, different universities have different preferences for profiles and activities.

Apart from the usual set of factors, your choice of university should also consider what opportunities and support you would require outside of the classroom, such as clubs, extra-curricular activities, sports, academic, career, and guidance counselling offered,

and which universities fare well in terms of what you most prioritise.

Step 4: Incorporate balance and strategy

While it is perfectly valid to want to attend the most reputed institutions in the world, operating with tunnel vision and the singular goal to land an acceptance from the most highly ranked institutions will never work in your best interest. It is also pertinent that you consider how well you will fare in the environment and community that the college offers, and if it aligns with your personality and skill set. Oftentimes, the universities consider this as well, and may choose to not make you an offer if they think you will not thrive there even if you meet the academic criteria.

A widely advised strategy to ensure success and happiness is to spread out your list across a couple of "reach" schools, a few "match" schools, and some "safety" schools. What is reach, match and safety will vary from person to person based on their individual profiles. But how would you know which is which for you?

Shahreer Zahan, CEO and Educational Consultant at Adroit Education, says, "The vast majority of applicants from Bangladesh require financial aid to cover at least part of the cost of attendance of US colleges, in that case, there are no safety schools that would guarantee admission even to a student with a very competitive profile. Thus, it is very important to make a well-informed, strategic college list that aligns with your profile and financial aid requirements."

"Before adding it to your list, research a university's history of admitting Bangladeshi students, aid policy for international applicants along with the university's general 'vibe'. These are important factors to consider. To know this, conduct research on local discussion groups (on social media) such as 'Bangladeshis Beyond Border' or particular subreddits. You can also attend virtual information sessions conducted by the school, or exchange emails and conduct interviews with current students and alumni. Needless to say, starting early helps," he adds.

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