



THE STELLAR CANDIDATE:

What Top US Universities Look For



Ryan
DARTMOUTH



★★★★



Alex
CORNELL



★★★★



Jenna
STANFORD



★★★★



Abang
UPENN



★★★★



Aiganym
BROWN



★★★★



Shravani
UCLA



★★★★



Alfonso
USC



★★★★



Sityana
YALE



★★★★



Paige
NORTHWESTERN



★★★★



Litong
UC BERKELEY



★★★★

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01.

Introduction

Gaining admission to a top US university has never been more competitive. With acceptance rates at some schools ranging from as low as 3% to around 20%, students applying to top 20, 30, and 50 universities face an intense selection process where academic brilliance is just the starting point. These institutions attract tens of thousands of applicants, each with high grades, impressive test scores, and outstanding achievements outside the classroom. As a result, the pressure on students to stand out has reached new heights.

Navigating this landscape can feel overwhelming. Universities in the upper ranks expect applicants to offer much more than good grades; they seek well-rounded individuals who excel both academically and personally. Whether through leadership, dedication to extracurriculars, or a strong sense of purpose, students need to present themselves as distinctive candidates with something unique to offer.

This eBook aims to demystify the admissions expectations at top US universities, providing students with a clear understanding of what it takes to succeed in this highly competitive environment. It will break down the key areas universities evaluate—academics, extracurricular activities, standardised testing, English proficiency (for students from non-native English-speaking countries), and beyond—helping students see where they need to focus their efforts to build an exceptional application. Whether you're targeting schools in the top 20, 30, or 50, this guide will equip you with the knowledge and strategies to elevate your candidacy and increase your chances of admission to the university of your dreams.



Wayne
Crimson Student

02.

The Holistic US Application Process

First, it's important to understand the unique and holistic application process that US universities are known for. Top US universities look for students who possess a combination of intellectual vitality, leadership, initiative, and creativity. This is demonstrated through:

40%

- Academics**

Top universities seek students who have consistently demonstrated academic excellence through outstanding high school grades, top school ranking positions, and participation in advanced courses, such as AP, A-Levels, or IB classes.

- Standardised Tests (SAT/ACT)**

Standardised tests, like the SAT and ACT, are used to help measure a student's aptitude for university-level studies. While top universities typically have high average SAT and ACT scores among their admitted students, many of these institutions have transitioned to test-optional policies in recent years.

30%

- Extracurricular and Leadership Activities**

Top universities seek students who are actively engaged in their communities. This is demonstrated through a diverse range of extracurricular activities. They value students who demonstrate initiative, teamwork, and a commitment to making a positive impact. This could include involvement in sports teams, clubs, community service projects, or other endeavours that align with their aspirations.

30%

- Essays**

The Personal Statement and Supplemental Essays provide students with an opportunity to showcase their personalities, experiences, and aspirations. Top universities seek students who can write thoughtfully and reflectively about themselves.

- Letters of Recommendation**

Letters of recommendation from teachers, counsellors, and other mentors can provide valuable insights into a student's character and potential. Top universities look for students who have strong recommendations from people who know them well.

- Interviews**

Some top universities also conduct personal interviews with applicants. These interviews allow the university to get to know the student better and assess their fit with the institution.

Still Unfamiliar with the US Admissions Process?

Take some time to check out *The Ultimate US Admissions Guide* first. This guide is your go-to resource for understanding everything you need to know about the holistic US admissions process and the unique advantages offered by top schools like Yale, Stanford, and MIT.



[Get Your Free Copy](#)

03.

The Current Admissions Landscape: How Top US Universities Remain Competitive



As we navigate the evolving landscape of university admissions, it's clear that top US universities have maintained, and in some cases intensified, their selectivity even as the world adjusts post-pandemic. The competitive nature of these institutions is evident in their admissions rates, which have continued to decrease, reinforcing their prestigious standing and attracting a growing number of applicants each year.

Admissions Rates: An In-Depth Analysis

The competitive landscape is further highlighted by the low admit rates among top US universities. For instance, Yale's rate has dropped from 4.4% to 3.7% between the 2023 and 2024 cycles. Similarly, Dartmouth's rate has decreased from 6.2% to 5.3% in the same period. These figures reflect a broader trend where high-profile institutions are becoming increasingly selective.

Interestingly, some top non-Ivy League schools, such as Duke and Vanderbilt, have also experienced significant decreases in their admit rates. Duke's rate fell from 10.7% in 2014 to 5.2% in 2024, while Vanderbilt's rate dropped from 12.3% to 5.1% over the same period. This increase in competitiveness among non-Ivy League schools reflects a wider shift in the admissions landscape, where institutions once considered slightly less competitive are now on par with their Ivy counterparts.

Despite the general downward trend in admissions rates over the past decade, recent data suggests that this trend may be levelling off, though the competition remains fierce. For example, Columbia's admit rate has stabilised at 3.8% for the Classes of 2027 and 2028, while Brown's rate has shown minimal fluctuation, moving from 5.1% to 5.2% over the same period.

YALE

4.4% (2023) → **3.7% (2024)**

DARTMOUTH

6.2% (2023) → **5.3% (2024)**

DUKE

10.7% (2014) → **5.2% (2024)**

VANDERBILT

12.3% (2014) → **5.1% (2024)**

COLUMBIA

Stabilised at 3.8%

BROWN

5.1% (2023) → **5.2% (2024)**



The Early Round Advantage

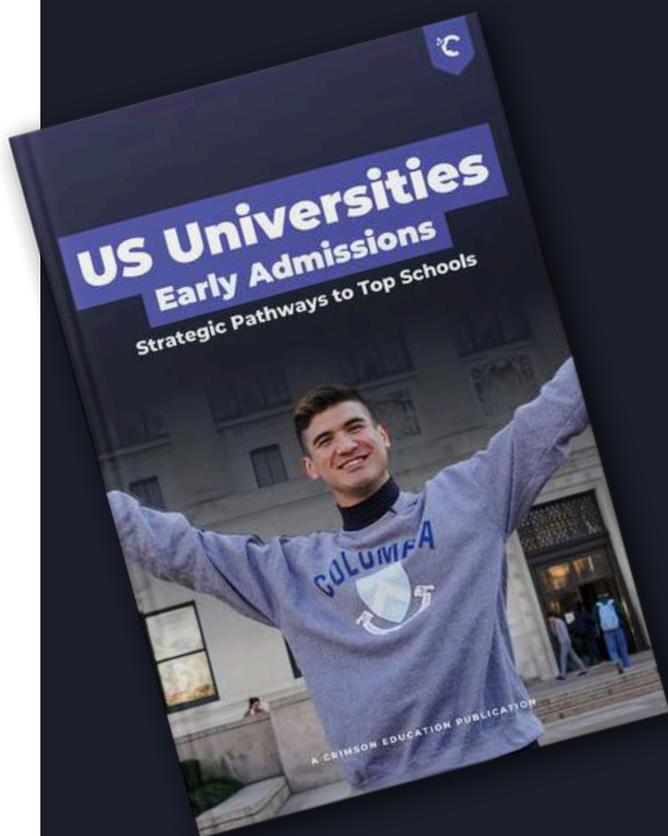
Another key aspect of the admissions process is the advantage of applying early. Early round admissions rates are often significantly higher than regular decision rates. For instance, Yale's early round acceptance rate is 9.0%, compared to an overall rate of 3.7%, offering a substantial boost for those who apply early.

YALE

Overall
3.7%



Early
9.0%



Early... what?

If Early Admissions is new to you, we recommend diving into our *Early Admissions Guide*. Click the link to explore this as your next read, where we cover everything you need to know—from the benefits and timelines to how it can boost your chances at top universities.

[Get Your Free Copy](#)

Tradition and Rankings

Tradition and historical rankings continue to play a significant role in maintaining the competitive nature of these universities. Schools with long-standing reputations and high rankings are perennially attractive to applicants. This reliance on tradition and rankings perpetuates their low admissions rates, as they remain highly sought after by students aiming for top-tier education.

Understanding Yield Rates

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many top universities temporarily adopted test-optional policies. However, recently, several prestigious institutions have reinstated SAT and ACT requirements. This shift underscores a return to traditional metrics for assessing academic readiness and potential. Universities such as Harvard, MIT, and Stanford have led this change, recognising that standardised tests offer a valuable benchmark for evaluating student performance.

SAT Scores:

1225

1366

1600

In conclusion, the landscape of top **US university admissions remains highly competitive, driven by both declining admit rates at many institutions and the maintenance of high selectivity at others.** The recent reinstatement of standardised testing, along with the influence of tradition and rankings, continues to shape the admissions process. While the competition is intense, understanding these dynamics and strategically navigating the process can provide aspiring students with a better chance of success.

04.

Financial Aid Need vs. Chances of Admission

When considering admissions to top US universities, it is crucial to understand how financial aid needs can influence a candidate's chances. In the highly competitive landscape of US university admissions, the need for financial aid can directly impact admissions decisions. Therefore, understanding the types of financial aid available and how universities weigh financial need in their evaluation process is essential for prospective students.



Types of Financial Aid and Their Impact

US universities offer a range of financial aid options, with their impact on the admissions process varying significantly. Scholarships can be broadly categorised into merit-based and need-based.

01.
Merit-based

02.
Need-based

01. Merit-based

These awards are designed to attract high-achieving students and are typically granted based on academic performance, extracurricular achievements, or other criteria. This category includes:

- **Academic Scholarships**

Awarded based on academic excellence and often given through specific applications or directly as part of the admissions process.

- **Athletic Scholarships**

Given to students with exceptional athletic abilities who contribute to a university's sports teams.

- **Endowed Scholarships**

Funded by donations from alumni or benefactors, these scholarships are usually awarded based on a combination of merit and specific criteria set by the donor.

Merit-based scholarships are generally separate from the admissions process and do not influence a student's likelihood of acceptance. However, candidates must still meet the required criteria for these scholarships. Students may apply for these awards through specific processes or receive them based on their overall application.

02. Need-Based Financial Aid

This type of aid is offered based on the applicant's financial need. Naturally, the candidate's profile and application are also thoroughly evaluated, as financial need alone is not the sole determinant in the admissions process. This type of financial aid directly impacts the admissions chances of a candidate, as institutions have different ways of evaluating candidates based on their financial aid needs, particularly at universities or colleges with limited financial resources.

For US citizens, financial aid options are generally more extensive. They have access to a broader range of federal and state financial aid programs, including grants, loans, and work-study opportunities. In contrast, international students often have fewer financial aid options.

In general, top US universities and colleges that offer need-based financial aid are divided into need-blind and need-aware categories:

• Need-Blind Institutions

Need-blind universities and colleges do not consider an applicant's financial need when making admissions decisions. This policy ensures that all applicants are evaluated solely on their application criteria and merits, as these universities have substantial endowments and financial resources, allowing them to support any admitted student regardless of their financial situation.

Here are the need-blind universities for US citizens:

- Amherst College
- Boston College
- Brown University
- California Institute of Technology
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Columbia University
- Cornell University
- Dartmouth College
- Duke University
- Georgetown University
- Johns Hopkins University
- New York University (NYU)
- Penn State
- Pomona College
- Stanford University
- University of Chicago



For international students, only seven schools in the US are need-blind: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Amherst, MIT, Dartmouth, and Bowdoin (with the latter two joining recently). It's not surprising that these institutions are among the most competitive in the US, as they cover 100% of the financial need for accepted students.

• Need-Aware Institutions

Need-aware universities and colleges do consider an applicant's financial need during the admissions process. With more limited budgets, these institutions must balance their financial aid resources and may favour students who can pay the full cost of attendance. In competitive scenarios, where two applicants have similar applications but one requires financial aid while the other does not, need-aware institutions may lean towards the student who does not need financial assistance. This can make the admissions process more competitive for those seeking financial aid, as they need to present a stronger application to offset their financial need.

These are some of the top universities with need-aware admissions policies.

- Washington University in St. Louis
- Auburn University
- Bates College
- Bryn Mawr College
- Carleton College
- Clemson University
- Colgate University
- Loyola Marymount University
- Northeastern University
- Smith College
- Tufts University
- Wesleyan University

Before we cover the standard expectations for universities in the top 20, 30, and 50, it is important to note that, especially if you are a non-US citizen who demonstrates financial need, you will likely need to exceed the already high expectations of top US universities and present an exceptional academic and extracurricular profile. While this can be challenging, it is not impossible; we have many of our Crimson students who have been accepted and received 100% of their financial need covered.



Tesvara

Crimson Student

05.

What Top 20, 30, & 50 US Universities Look For

Now that we've covered the admissions process and explored the current US university landscape, let's dive into the expectations set by universities across different tiers of competitiveness. This chapter breaks down the typical requirements for universities in the top 20, 30, and 50, based on the US News & Report ranking. While each institution has its unique criteria, this section offers an overview of the academic, extracurricular, and personal qualities candidates are usually expected to demonstrate at each level.

The Expectations for the Top 20 US Universities

The top 20 US universities, including those in the Ivy League and Ivy Plus groups, are renowned for their deep-rooted traditions and intense competitiveness. The Ivy League, with prestigious institutions like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, is celebrated for its long-standing history of academic excellence and influential alumni. The Ivy Plus group, which includes additional elite universities such as Stanford, Duke, Caltech and MIT, further underscores this blend of tradition and scholarly rigour. These universities uphold their prestigious status through a combination of historical significance and a highly competitive admissions process, securing their place at the forefront of higher education.

The Current Top 20 Universities

The top 20 US universities, including those in the Ivy League and Ivy Plus groups, are renowned for their deep-rooted traditions and intense competitiveness. The Ivy League, with prestigious institutions like Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, is celebrated for its long-standing history of academic excellence and influential alumni. The Ivy Plus group, which includes additional elite universities such as Stanford, Duke, Caltech and MIT, further underscores this blend of tradition and scholarly rigour. These universities uphold their prestigious status through a combination of historical significance and a highly competitive admissions process, securing their place at the forefront of higher education.

- Princeton University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
- Harvard University
- Stanford University
- Yale University
- University of Pennsylvania
- California Institute of Technology (Caltech)
- Duke University
- Brown University
- Johns Hopkins University
- Northwestern University
- Columbia University
- Cornell University
- University of Chicago
- University of California - Berkeley
- University of California - Los Angeles
- Rice University
- Dartmouth College,
- Vanderbilt University,
- University of Notre Dame.





Academic Expectations

Top 20 US universities place a high value on academic excellence and expect applicants to demonstrate strong academic performance across a rigorous curriculum, typically being in the top 1% to 5% of their high school class ranking when such rankings are available.

While specific academic requirements can vary slightly depending on the institution, there are general standards that students are expected to meet, particularly if they are targeting highly competitive schools. Check some examples at right:

GPA

Universities expect students to have near-perfect or perfect GPAs, often above 3.9 on a 4.0 scale, indicating consistently high performance across all subjects.



International Baccalaureate (IB)

A score of 40+ points, with strong results in Higher Level (HL) subjects. Universities expect students to take the most challenging courses available.



Advanced Placement (AP)

Students are typically expected to take 6-10 AP courses and achieve top scores (5s) across most subjects.



A-Levels

Predominantly A* or A grades in most subjects, especially in those aligned with their intended field of study.



ATAR (Australia)

Top universities would expect an ATAR score above 98, reflecting the top percentile of students in the country.





Extracurricular Expectations

The top 20 universities are among the most selective and expect students to demonstrate a high level of achievement and leadership across various areas, with a strong emphasis on impact and initiative. These institutions often seek students who have made meaningful contributions, sometimes at national or even international levels, and who have taken the lead on significant projects or causes.

Leadership Roles in Significant Organisations

- President of a student body or founder of a major student-led initiative.
- Leadership in community service groups, academic clubs, or advocacy groups.
- Creating and leading successful non-profits, start-ups, or impactful projects.

High-Level Competitions & Awards

- National or international academic competitions (e.g., Intel ISEF, Olympiads, Regeneron Science Talent Search).
- Athletic achievements at the state, national, or international level.

Research Experience with Publication

- Conducting advanced research under a professor or university lab with a published paper or significant outcome.
- Participating in prestigious research programs like the Research Science Institute (RSI) or similar programs.

Research Experience with Publication

- Conducting advanced research under a professor or university lab with a published paper or significant outcome.
- Participating in prestigious research programs like the Research Science Institute (RSI) or similar programs.

Artistic Achievement

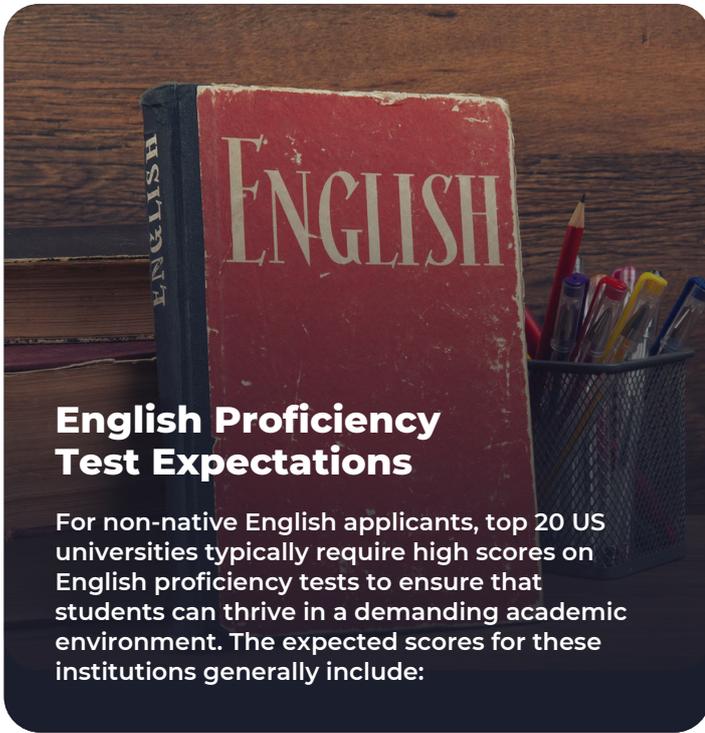
- Awards or recognitions in national or international arts competitions (visual arts, music, theatre, dance).
- Creation of widely recognised portfolios or performances.

Community Impact Projects

- Founding or leading impactful community service initiatives that show measurable, long-lasting results.
- Significant contributions to solving real-world problems through social entrepreneurship.

Internships with Prestigious Organisations

- Internships or work experiences with Fortune 500 companies, prominent non-profits, or government agencies.



English Proficiency Test Expectations

For non-native English applicants, top 20 US universities typically require high scores on English proficiency tests to ensure that students can thrive in a demanding academic environment. The expected scores for these institutions generally include:

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language)

A minimum TOEFL iBT score of 100–110 is typically expected, out of a maximum 120, with strong performance in each section (Reading, Listening, Speaking, and Writing).

100-110
minimum

IELTS (International English Language Testing System)

A typical IELTS requirement is a 7.0–7.5 overall band score (out of 9), with no section scoring below 6.5.

7.0-7.5
minimum

Duolingo English Test

A minimum Duolingo English Test score of 120–135 is often expected, out of a maximum of 160.

120-135
minimum

These scores help demonstrate proficiency in academic English and the ability to engage effectively with the university's curriculum. Specific score requirements can vary by institution, so it is important for applicants to check the individual requirements of each university.

Top 20 Universities - Stats and Facts

If you're an ambitious student aiming to apply to the top 20 US universities, particularly as a non-US citizen, it's essential to have a clear understanding of the key data and trends that shape the admissions landscape. Factors such as SAT and ACT scores, acceptance rates, and undergraduate enrollment provide crucial insight into the academic expectations. Additionally, international applicants should consider the percentage of international students in the overall undergraduate population, the availability of need-based and merit-based financial aid for noncitizens, the average aid award for international students, and the proportion of international noncitizens receiving aid. By analysing these statistics, you can gain a more comprehensive view of the competitiveness and support systems available at each institution, allowing you to make informed decisions when applying.



Jasper

Crimson Student

Top 20 Universities - Stats and Facts							
Name	Rank	Location	Tuition & Fees (out of state)	SAT Scores	ACT Scores	Acceptance Rate (%)	Number of Full-Time Undergraduate Students
Princeton University	#1	Princeton, NJ	\$84,040	1500-1580	34-35	4%*	5,579
MIT	#2	Cambridge, MA	\$82,730	1520-1580	35-36	4.52%	4,516
Harvard University	#3	Cambridge, MA	\$86,705	1490-1580	34-36	3.59%*	7,178
Stanford University	#3	Stanford, CA	\$87,833	1500-1580	33-35	3.9%*	7,761
Yale University	#5	New Haven, CT	\$88,300	1500-1580	33-35	3.70%	6,798
UPenn	#6	Philadelphia, PA	\$89,028	1500-1570	34-35	5.8%**	9,717
Caltech	#7	Pasadena, CA	\$86,886	1530-1580	35-36	3.14%**	1,023
Duke University	#7	Durham, NC	\$87,072	1490-1570	34-35	5.10%	6,417
Brown University	#9	Providence, RI	\$87,648	1490-1580	34-36	5.20%	7,211
Johns Hopkins University	#9	Baltimore, MD	\$86,065	1520-1570	34-35	6.2%**	5,632
Northwestern University	#9	Evanston, IL	\$91,290	1490-1570	33-35	7.5%	8,713
Columbia University	#12	New York, NY	\$89,587	1470-1570	34-35	3.85%	6,578
Cornell University	#12	Ithaca, NY	\$88,140	1470-1570	33-35	7.5%*	15,955
University of Chicago	#12	Chicago, IL	\$90,360	1500-1580	34-35	4%*	7,540
UC, Berkeley	#15	Berkeley, CA	\$75,830	Test-blind	Test-blind	~10.8%*	31,542
UCLA	#15	Los Angeles, CA	\$68,808	Test-blind	Test-blind	~8.7%*	32,466
Rice University	#17	Houston, TX	\$78,278	1490-1570	34-36	7.51%	4,562
Dartmouth College	#18	Hanover, NH	\$87,793	1500-1580	33-35	5.32%	4,367
Vanderbilt University	#19	Nashville, TN	\$89,590	1490-1570	34-35	5.09%	7,086
University of Notre Dame	#20	Notre Dame, IN	\$83,271	1420-1550	32-35	11.10%	8,953
Source: US News World & Report; Jennie Kent & Jeff Levy Data Set							

Top 20 Universities - Stats and Facts

Name	Number of Full-Time International Noncitizen Undergraduate Students	Percentage of International Noncitizen Students Among All Undergraduates	Offers Need-Based Financial Aid to International Students?	Offers Merit-Based Financial Aid to International Students?	Average International Noncitizen Aid Award	Percent of International Noncitizens Receiving Aid
Princeton University	684	12.26%	Yes	Yes	\$78,606	75%
MIT	448	9.92%	Yes	Yes	\$62,638	83%
Harvard University	985	13.72%	Yes	Yes	\$75,088	72%
Stanford University	924	11.91%	Yes	Yes	\$75,756	27%
Yale University	724	10.65%	Yes	Yes	\$80,285	61%
UPenn	1,299	13.37%	Yes	Yes	\$67,366	28%
Caltech	126	12.32%	Yes	Yes	\$74,155	50%
Duke University	441	6.87%	Yes	No	\$84,776	41%
Brown University	886	12.29%	Yes	Yes	\$78,765	30%
Johns Hopkins University	847	15.04%	Yes	Yes	\$12,136	71%
Northwestern University	926	10.63%	Yes	No	\$71,851	29%
Columbia University	1,015	15.43%	Yes	Yes	\$83,347	22%
Cornell University	1,176	7.37%	Yes	Yes	\$83,060	28%
University of Chicago	1,195	15.85%	Yes	Yes	\$60,506	23%
UC, Berkeley	3,799	12.04%	No	No	N/A	N/A
UCLA	2,542	7.83%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Rice University	569	12.47%	Yes	Yes	\$70,452	24%
Dartmouth College	603	13.81%	Yes	Yes	\$81,378	69%
Vanderbilt University	716	10.10%	Yes	No	\$78,582	28%
University of Notre Dame	598	6.68%	Yes	Yes	\$64,039	50%

The Expectations for the Top 30 US Universities

While the top 30 US universities share a commitment to academic excellence, their expectations are slightly more flexible than those of the top 20. Institutions in this range, while still highly selective, provide a bit more leeway in terms of academic performance and extracurricular achievements. These universities maintain strong reputations for their academic offerings, resources, and alumni networks. Some examples include prestigious public universities like the University of Michigan–Ann Arbor and the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill, alongside renowned private institutions such as Georgetown and Carnegie Mellon. Each of these schools continues to offer a competitive admissions process, requiring candidates to demonstrate robust academic and extracurricular profiles.



Alfonso

Crimson Student

The Current Top 30 Universities

The top 20 universities +

- University of Michigan–Ann Arbor
- Georgetown University
- University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill
- Carnegie Mellon University
- Emory University
- University of Virginia
- Washington University in St. Louis
- University of California, Davis
- University of California, San Diego
- University of Florida
- University of Southern California



Academic Expectations

The top 30 universities expect students to maintain strong academic performance, typically within the top 5% to 10% of their class, though slightly more variation is allowed compared to the top 20. General academic expectations include:

GPA

Typically above 3.8, though candidates with exceptional extracurriculars may be considered with a slightly lower GPA.

above
3.8

International Baccalaureate (IB)

A score of 37+ points, with solid performance in Higher Level (HL) subjects.

37+
points

Advanced Placement (AP)

Students are encouraged to take around 5-7 AP courses, with top scores (4s and 5s) expected across key subjects.

4s & 5s
across key
subjects

A-Levels

Mainly A and A* grades across all subjects, especially in subjects related to the intended field of study.

A* or A
across all
subjects

ATAR (Australia)

Universities typically expect a score around 96+.

above
96



Extracurricular Expectations

While the top 30 universities seek a high level of extracurricular involvement, the focus shifts slightly from national and international leadership to more regional or local initiatives. Examples include:

Active Leadership Roles

- Leadership positions in multiple school organisations (e.g., clubs, student government, sports teams).
- Leading community service projects with notable local impact.

Competitive Awards at State or Regional Level

- Awards in regional science fairs, debate tournaments, Model United Nations, or arts competitions.
- Participation in state-level athletic competitions.

Research and Internships

- Research experience, though not necessarily published, through school programs or summer camps.
- Internships with local businesses, startups, or research labs.

Creative Arts and Performance

- Participation in school theatre productions, art exhibitions, or musical performances.
- Achieving regional recognition or awards in artistic fields.

Meaningful Volunteering

- Long-term involvement in community service or social impact initiatives, preferably with a leadership role.
- Volunteering in areas related to career interests (e.g., hospital volunteering for pre-med students).

English Proficiency Test Expectations

For non-native English speakers, English proficiency requirements remain high, with the following scores typically expected:

TOEFL

A minimum score of 100 to 105 (out of 120) on the iBT, with strong performance in each section.

100-105
minimum

IELTS

An overall band score of 7.0 (out of 9.0), with no section below 6.5.

7.0
overall

Duolingo English Test

A minimum score of 115 to 125 (out of 160) is generally acceptable for top 30 schools.

115-125
minimum



Maria

Crimson Student

Top 30 Universities - Stats & Facts

Name	Rank	Location	Tuition & Fees (out of state)	SAT Scores	ACT Scores	Acceptance Rate (%)	Number of Full-Time Undergraduate Students
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	#21	Ann Arbor, MI	\$75,626	1350-1530	31-34	19.00%	31,148
Georgetown University	#22	Washington, DC	\$88,741	1390-1560	32-35	12.00%	7,186
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill	#22	Chapel Hill, NC	\$56,450	1350-1530	30-34	23.50%	19,162
Carnegie Mellon University	#24	Pittsburgh, PA	\$83,697	1490-1570	34-35	15.40%	7,443
Emory University	#24	Atlanta, GA	\$83,622	1430-1550	32-34	10.60%	7,199
University of Virginia	#24	Charlottesville, VA	\$76,954	1400-1540	32-34	19.00%	16,720
Washington University in St. Louis	#24	St. Louis, MO	\$88,488	1500-1570	33-35	12.00%	7,523
University of California, Davis	#28	Davis, CA	\$71,832	Test-blind	Test-blind	37.50%	30,909
University of California, San Diego	#28	La Jolla, CA	\$69,282	Test-blind	Test-blind	23.70%	32,839
University of Florida	#28	Gainesville, FL	\$44,879	1300-1490	28-33	28.90%	30,690
University of Southern California	#28	Los Angeles, CA	\$90,453	1450-1550	32-35	12.00%	20,057

Source: US News World & Report; Jennie Kent & Jeff Levy Data Set

Top 30 Universities - Stats & Facts

Name	Number of Full-Time International Noncitizen Undergraduate Students	Percentage of International Noncitizen Students Among All Undergraduates	Offers Need-Based Financial Aid to International Students?	Offers Merit-Based Financial Aid to International Students?	Average International Noncitizen Aid Award	Percent of International Noncitizens Receiving Aid
University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	2,653	8.52%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Georgetown University	1,019	14.18%	No	No	N/A	N/A
University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill	1,091	5.69%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Carnegie Mellon University	1,769	23.77%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Emory University	1,180	16.39%	Yes	No	\$56,780	6%
University of Virginia	794	4.75%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Washington University in St. Louis	648	8.61%	Yes	Yes	\$63,918	5%
University of California, Davis	4,157	13.45%	Yes	No	\$12,970	3%
University of California, San Diego	3,986	12.14%	No	No	N/A	N/A
University of Florida	734	2.39%	No	No	N/A	N/A
University of Southern California	2,858	14.25%	No	Yes	\$25,588	31%

Source: US News World & Report; Jennie Kent & Jeff Levy Data Set

The Expectations for the Top 50 US Universities

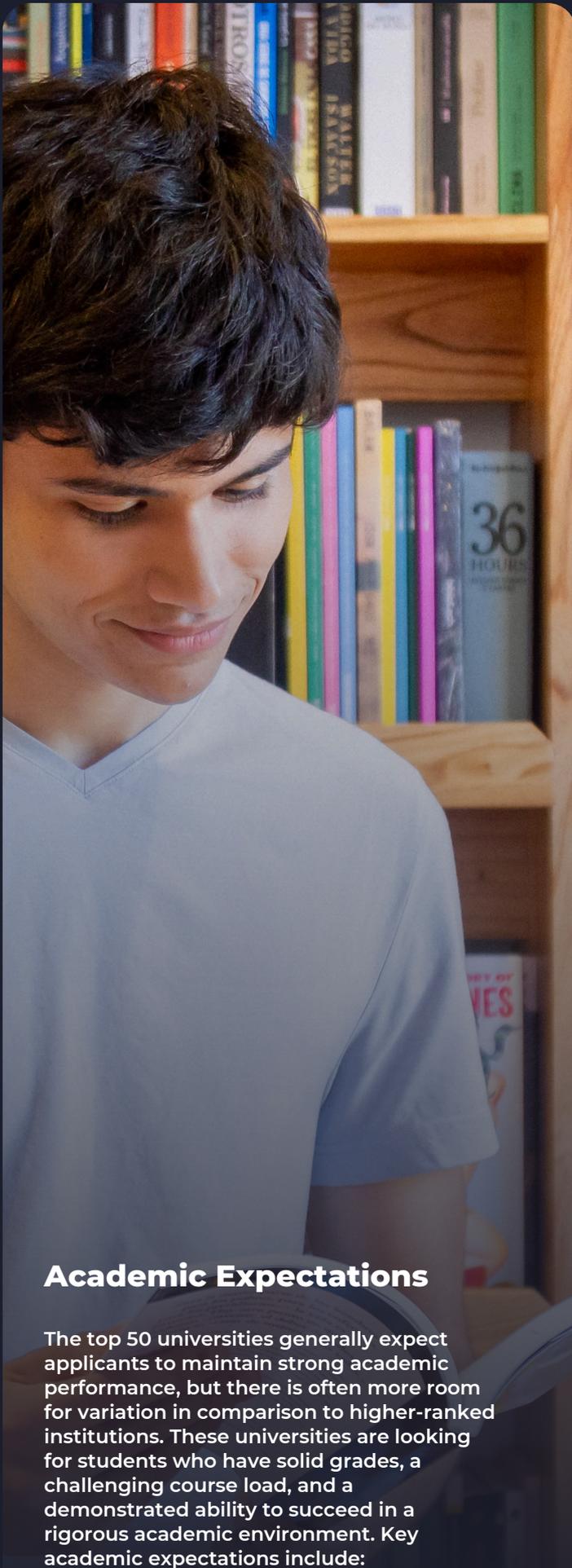
The top 50 US universities, while still demanding in terms of academic performance and extracurricular achievements, offer a wider range of expectations compared to the top 30 and top 20 institutions. These universities include both large public institutions and private universities, each offering a robust academic experience and extensive resources. Though still competitive, these schools may provide slightly more flexibility for students with strong profiles but less traditional paths. Schools like the University of Texas at Austin, Georgia Institute of Technology, and New York University are known for their strong academic offerings, and others like Boston University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison are renowned for their diverse student populations and broad academic resources.

The Current Top 50 Universities

The top 30 universities +

- The University of Texas--Austin
- Georgia Institute of Technology
- University of California--Irvine
- New York University
- University of California
- Santa Barbara
- University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign
- University of Wisconsin--Madison
- Boston College
- Rutgers University--New Brunswick
- Tufts University
- University of Washington
- Boston University
- The Ohio State University
- Purdue University--Main Campus
- University of Maryland, College Park
- Lehigh University
- Texas A&M University
- University of Georgia
- University of Rochester
- Virginia Tech
- Wake Forest University





Academic Expectations

The top 50 universities generally expect applicants to maintain strong academic performance, but there is often more room for variation in comparison to higher-ranked institutions. These universities are looking for students who have solid grades, a challenging course load, and a demonstrated ability to succeed in a rigorous academic environment. Key academic expectations include:

GPA

Students typically need a GPA above 3.7, though some universities may consider candidates with a slightly lower GPA if they have exceptional extracurriculars or test scores.

above
3.7

International Baccalaureate (IB)

A score of 34+ points is generally expected, with solid performance in Higher Level (HL) subjects.

34+
points

Advanced Placement (AP)

Students should aim for 4-6 AP courses, with a majority of scores being 4s or 5s.

4s & 5s
across most
subjects

A-Levels

Predominantly A and B grades, especially in subjects related to the student's intended field of study.

A or B
across most
subjects

ATAR (Australia)

A score of 94+ typically aligns with the expectations of top 50 universities.

above
94



Extracurricular Expectations

While top 50 universities still place emphasis on extracurricular involvement, students should aim to show meaningful commitment, initiative, and leadership across their activities. Examples of extracurricular expectations include:

Club Participation and Leadership

- Active participation in multiple school clubs, with leadership roles in at least one.
- Leadership in sports teams or school organisations.

Local or School-Level Awards

- Recognition at the school or district level for academic, athletic, or artistic achievements.
- Participation in local competitions or talent showcases.

Community Service and Volunteering

- Consistent involvement in local community service projects, even if not in a leadership position.
- Volunteering with local non-profits, shelters, or schools.

School-Based Research or Projects

- Participation in school research projects or science fairs, even if they are not published or nationally recognised.

Athletics and Arts

- Participation in school sports teams, theatre productions, or musical ensembles without necessarily achieving state or national accolades.

Work Experience

- Part-time jobs, internships, or summer employment that demonstrate responsibility and career interests.

English Proficiency Test Expectations

For non-native English speakers, proficiency test requirements at top 50 US universities remain high, though there may be some variation depending on the institution. Typical expectations include:

TOEFL

A minimum score of 95 to 100 (out of 120) on the iBT, with balanced scores across the sections.

100-105
minimum

IELTS

An overall band score of 7.0 (out of 9.0), with no section below 6.5.

7.0
overall

Duolingo English Test

A minimum score of 110 to 120 (out of 160) is generally expected.

110-120
minimum

These schools look for applicants who can succeed in a demanding academic setting and contribute meaningfully to the university community, balancing strong academics with impactful extracurricular involvement.



Top 50 Universities - Stats & Facts

Name	Rank	Location	Tuition & Fees (out of state)	SAT Scores	ACT Scores	Acceptance Rate (%)	Number of Full-Time Undergraduate Students
The University of Texas-Austin	#32	Austin, TX	\$62,672	N/A	29-34	31.80%	38,444
Georgia Institute of Technology	#33	Atlanta, GA	\$49,636	1370-1550	31-35	17%	16,110
University of California-Irvine	#33	Irvine, CA	\$69,828	Test-blind	Test-blind	20.90%	28,869
New York University	#35	New York, NY	\$87,752	1470-1570	33-35	12.20%	28,458
UC, Santa Barbara	#35	Santa Barbara, CA	\$71,364	Test-blind	Test-blind	25.80%	22,659
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	#35	Champaign, IL	\$52,139	1340-1530	29-34	59.00%	33,273
University of Wisconsin-Madison	#35	Madison, WI	\$58,303	1350-1510	28-33	54.00%	34,001
Boston College	#39	Chestnut Hill, MA	\$89,605	1435-1540	33-35	16.00%	9,484
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	#40	Piscataway, NJ	\$36,001	1270-1480	28-33	66%	34,233
Tufts University	#40	Medford, MA	\$88,300	1450-1550	33-35	9.00%	6,732
University of Washington	#40	Seattle, WA	\$63,906	1300-1520	29-34	10%	29,799
Boston University	#43	Boston, MA	\$86,363	1350-1500	31-34	14.00%	17,664
The Ohio State University	#43	Columbus, OH	\$56,737	1310-1480	29-32	57.00%	41,782
Purdue University -Main Campus	#43	West Lafayette, IN	\$43,684	1200-1470	27-34	53%	36,133
University of Maryland, College Park	#46	College Park, MD	\$59,686	1360-1520	30-34	44%	27,912
Lehigh University	#47	Bethlehem, PA	\$81,150	1340-1490	30-33	36.00%	5,732
Texas A&M University	#47	College Station, TX	\$60,736	1150-1390	25-31	63%	51,040
University of Georgia	#47	Athens, GA	\$47,146	1220-1420	27-32	39.00%	29,852
University of Rochester	#47	Rochester, NY	\$85,962	1390-1540	31-34	31.40%	6,209
Virginia Tech	#47	Blacksburg, VA	\$58,468	1220-1420	26-32	57%	29,504
Wake Forest University	#47	Winston-Salem, NC	\$87,556	1380-1510	31-34	25.00%	5,401

Top 50 Universities - Stats & Facts

Name	Number of Full-Time International Noncitizen Undergraduate Students	Percentage of International Noncitizen Students Among All Undergraduates	Offers Need-Based Financial Aid to International Students?	Offers Merit-Based Financial Aid to International Students?	Average International Noncitizen Aid Award	Percent of International Noncitizens Receiving Aid
The University of Texas-Austin	1,812	4.71%	Yes	Yes	\$28,070	18%
Georgia Institute of Technology	1,610	9.99%	No	No	N/A	N/A
University of California-Irvine	3,507	12.15%	No	No	N/A	N/A
New York University	7,710	27.09%	Yes	No	\$36,706	5%
UC, Santa Barbara	2,266	10.00%	No	No	N/A	N/A
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	4,726	14.20%	Yes	No	\$5,420	1%
University of Wisconsin-Madison	3,569	10.50%	Yes	No	Not available	Not available
Boston College	1827	19.26%	Yes	Yes	Not available	Not available
Rutgers University-New Brunswick	3,455	10.09%	No	Yes	\$15,049	9%
Tufts University	834	12.39%	Yes	Yes	\$76,596	26%
University of Washington	4,012	13.46%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Boston University	3,899	22.07%	Yes	Yes	\$45,811	6%
The Ohio State University	3,153	7.55%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Purdue University -Main Campus	4,018	11.12%	Yes	Yes	\$2,884	9%
University of Maryland, College Park	961	\$59,686	1360-1520	30-34	44%	27,912
Lehigh University	438	7.64%	Yes	No	\$64,916	36%
Texas A&M University	654	1.28%	Yes	Yes	\$34,246	33%
University of Georgia	319	1.07%	No	No	N/A	N/A
University of Rochester	1,514	24.38%	Yes	No	\$40,994	31%
Virginia Tech	1,333	4.52%	No	No	N/A	N/A
Wake Forest University	414	7.67%	No	No	N/A	N/A

06.

Tips to Stand Out

Standing out in the admissions process for top US universities—whether aiming for the top 20, top 30, or top 50—requires not only academic excellence but also a strategic and well-rounded approach throughout your high school years. Here are some advanced tips to help you distinguish yourself from other applicants:

Plan Your High School Journey **Early**

A strong academic and extracurricular foundation begins with early preparation. During your freshman and sophomore years, focus on taking a rigorous curriculum that will demonstrate your intellectual capabilities. Opt for the most challenging courses available to you, including Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), or A-Levels, depending on your country's system. But planning goes beyond academics:

- **Identify a clear academic interest or passion early on.**

Whether it's in STEM, humanities, or the arts, having a distinct academic direction will help you curate a strong, consistent application narrative by the time you're applying to universities.

- **Get involved in extracurricular activities that align with your academic or career interests.**

If you're passionate about science, join science clubs or research programs. If you're drawn to public service, participate in community projects or social impact initiatives. Universities look for students who are both intellectually curious and committed to making a difference.

Build Depth in Your **Extracurriculars**

While a broad array of extracurricular activities is beneficial, depth is even more critical, especially for top 20 and top 30 universities. Focus on a few key areas where you can develop expertise and leadership over time.

- **Pursue leadership roles**

Universities value students who take initiative and demonstrate leadership. Aim for president or vice-president positions in your school clubs, or start your own initiative if you identify an area of need within your community or school.

- **Seek national or international recognition**

For competitive schools, standing out requires more than just participation. Winning prestigious awards (e.g., Olympiads, Intel ISEF, regional championships) or achieving recognition on a larger scale (e.g., research publications, entrepreneurial achievements) will differentiate you from other candidates.

- **Find ways to create impact**

Schools are looking for students who don't just excel in their activities but who also drive change. This might mean leading a community service project that produces measurable outcomes, or initiating a successful fundraising campaign for a cause you care about.





Pursue Advanced Opportunities

Top-tier universities expect applicants to go beyond what is simply required by the high school curriculum. This means seeking out advanced opportunities that will show admissions officers that you are both ambitious and committed to personal growth.

- **Research experience**

Gaining hands-on research experience, especially if you're interested in STEM fields, is a significant advantage. Many top universities value students who have conducted research at an advanced level, particularly if they have worked with university professors or participated in research competitions.

- **Summer programs & pre-college courses**

Enrolling in competitive summer programs, such as the Research Science Institute (RSI) or Stanford Pre-Collegiate Studies, signals to universities that you're eager to challenge yourself beyond the classroom.

- **Dual enrollment or college-level courses**

Taking college-level courses while still in high school not only boosts your academic profile but also helps you develop skills that will be valuable at university. If possible, look for local universities or online platforms that offer courses aligned with your intended major.

Craft a **Strong** Application Narrative

Your application should tell a coherent and compelling story that reflects your academic and extracurricular journey. Top schools aren't just looking for students with good grades and impressive activities; they want to know how your experiences have shaped your personal growth, leadership qualities, and future aspirations.

- **Showcase your unique strengths**

Focus on the qualities that differentiate you, whether it's an uncommon skill, a distinctive leadership role, or an extraordinary achievement in a niche area.

- **Be reflective**

Your experiences should demonstrate growth, learning, and the ability to overcome challenges. Schools want to admit students who are self-aware and capable of adapting to and thriving in complex environments.



Talia

Crimson Student

07.

Is Meeting the Criteria Enough to Guarantee Admission to Top US Universities?

Meeting the standard expectations of top US universities is essential, but even for candidates who meet these expectations, admission is never guaranteed. This became evident when Harvard University, following a 2014 lawsuit, was required to disclose key details about its highly selective admissions process. As part of the case, Harvard revealed its use of a comprehensive rating system, where applicants are scored from 1 to 6 across several criteria, including academics, extracurricular activities, and personal qualities. The scoring ranges from 1 (the highest) to 6, based on academic performance.

A closer look at how **HARVARD** describes the academic scoring criteria:

Academic Rating of 1

Reserved for only 0.5% of applicants, these students demonstrate "Summa potential"—perfect or near-perfect grades and test scores, along with exceptional creativity and scholarship. Even among these top candidates, 69.2% are admitted.

Academic Rating of 2

Around 42.3% of applicants—students with outstanding grades and test scores (mid-to-high 700s SAT or 33+ ACT)—receive this rating, and 12.4% are admitted.

Academic Rating of 3

These students meet strong academic standards (mid-600 to low-700 SAT or 29-32 ACT), but only 4.2% of this group are admitted.

Academic Rating	Applicants	% of Population	Admitted	Admit Rate
1 (Summa potential)	650	0.50%	450	69.20%
2 (Magna potential)	60,468	42.30%	7,500	12.40%
3 (Cum laude potential)	58,061	40.60%	2,429	4.20%
4 (Adequate preparation)	17,692	12.40%	175	1.00%
5 (Marginal potential)	5,696	4.20%	4.20%	0.10%

Although applicants in the Academic Rating 1 group have the highest admission rates, the majority of students admitted come from groups 2 and 3, which have comparable academic levels. Together, these two groups make up the largest portion of the admitted class, showing that over 80% of students admitted to Harvard share similar academic backgrounds. However, meeting these academic standards is only one part of the admissions equation.

Harvard's admissions process, like that of many other top US universities, goes beyond academics by employing a holistic approach. While strong academic performance is essential, it's not enough on its own. Harvard and other top schools use additional criteria to differentiate candidates—such as extracurricular involvement and personal qualities like "grit," "leadership," and even "humour." Personal statements and supplemental essays are especially important in revealing a candidate's character, values, and individual story. These aspects, combined with academic performance, create a fuller picture of the applicant and help determine the overall admissions decision.

With so many students meeting the standard academic expectations and excelling in extracurriculars, the real challenge lies in crafting a comprehensive application that stands out.

This leads to an important question: With so many students meeting the academic and extracurricular standards, what truly makes a candidate stand out in such a competitive environment?

With acceptance rates as low as 3-5%, every detail of your application can make the difference between being accepted or rejected. How you frame your extracurricular activities, craft your personal statement, and showcase your leadership skills are all critical components that top universities carefully evaluate. This is where Crimson Education comes in.



Crimson's personalised strategies and expert mentorship can give you the edge you need. By helping you refine every aspect of your application—from essays to extracurriculars—Crimson ensures that you stand out in an increasingly competitive admissions landscape. Discover how Crimson can help you achieve your academic goals and secure a place at your dream university.



10 YEARS OF STUDENT SUCCESS



08.

Crimson Students' Unique Position

At Crimson, we know that every student's journey is unique. That's why we specialise in building tailored strategies to meet each individual's needs, ensuring that every aspect of their application reflects their personal strengths and goals. Our personalised approach ensures that students receive guidance that is specific to their profile, allowing them to excel in a highly competitive admissions process.



Ryan
DARTMOUTH



Alex
CORNELL



Jenna
STANFORD



Abang
UPENN



Aiganym
BROWN



Shravani
UCLA



Alfonso
USC



Sityana
YALE



Paige
NORTHWESTERN



Litong
UC BERKELEY



Max
UCHICAGO



Allie
DUKE



Jasper
MIT



Weronika
NYU



Mari
COLUMBIA



Comprehensive & Personalised Services

Our personalised guidance covers all critical aspects of the admissions journey, including:

Strategic planning

that focuses on identifying goals and areas of improvement, no matter the year of school or when the student starts working with us. We ensure that students have a clear, tailored plan that aligns with their academic and personal development.

Academic planning to optimise course selection and performance.

Academic tutoring

for curriculums like IB, AP, A-Levels, and more, ensuring students excel across a range of international standards.

IB | AP | A-Levels, and more

Standardised test preparation for SAT, ACT, and more.

SAT | ACT, and more

Extracurricular strategy

to highlight leadership, impact, and initiative, including the creation of capstone projects from scratch, ensuring students demonstrate innovation and real-world problem-solving.

Creation of capstone projects

School list selection

that helps students identify the universities that best align with their strengths, aspirations, and career goals, ensuring a balanced and strategic approach to applications.

Essay support to craft compelling personal statements and supplements.

Application reviews to ensure all components align with your goals.

Access to unique research and internship opportunities through programs like Indigo.

indigo

This tailored support gives students the advantage they need to not only meet but exceed the expectations of top universities.





Kimberley L.
Stanford Former
Admissions Officer

Expertise & Insider Knowledge

Crimson's team consists of former admissions officers from top universities and expert strategists who know exactly what admissions committees are looking for. With this insider expertise, we stay ahead of the curve, keeping up with emerging trends and changing criteria, ensuring our students are equipped to succeed in an ever-evolving admissions landscape.

Our ability to anticipate admissions trends—whether it's the shift toward holistic evaluations or increased focus on leadership and impact—positions Crimson students for success. We help them present themselves in the most effective and compelling way, highlighting what will truly stand out to admissions committees.

Admissions Advantage: Expert Analysis & Strategy

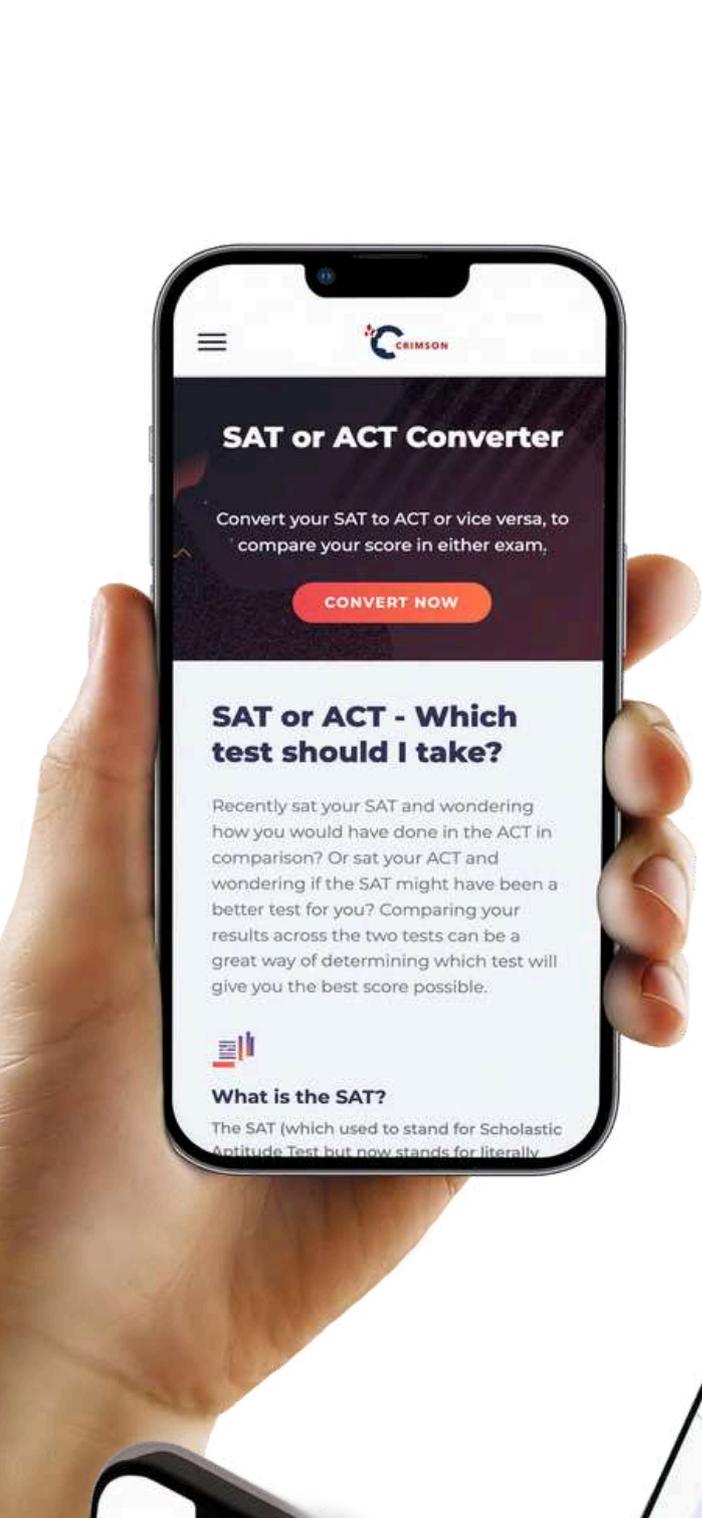
The road to a top-tier university starts long before the application process, and that's where Crimson's strategic approach makes all the difference.

We don't just focus on academic performance—we help students build a well-rounded profile that showcases their full potential.

By analysing each student's strengths, interests, and goals, we craft a personalised strategy that allows them to shine in areas where they hold a competitive advantage. Whether it's enhancing their extracurricular activities, maximising leadership roles, or excelling in niche subjects, our strategic guidance helps students distinguish themselves from other applicants.

With acceptance rates dropping every year at top universities, every detail counts. At Crimson, we ensure that students are not only prepared but positioned to excel. Our strategic guidance helps students make well-informed decisions about their academic and extracurricular paths, ensuring that they showcase their best selves in every element of their application.



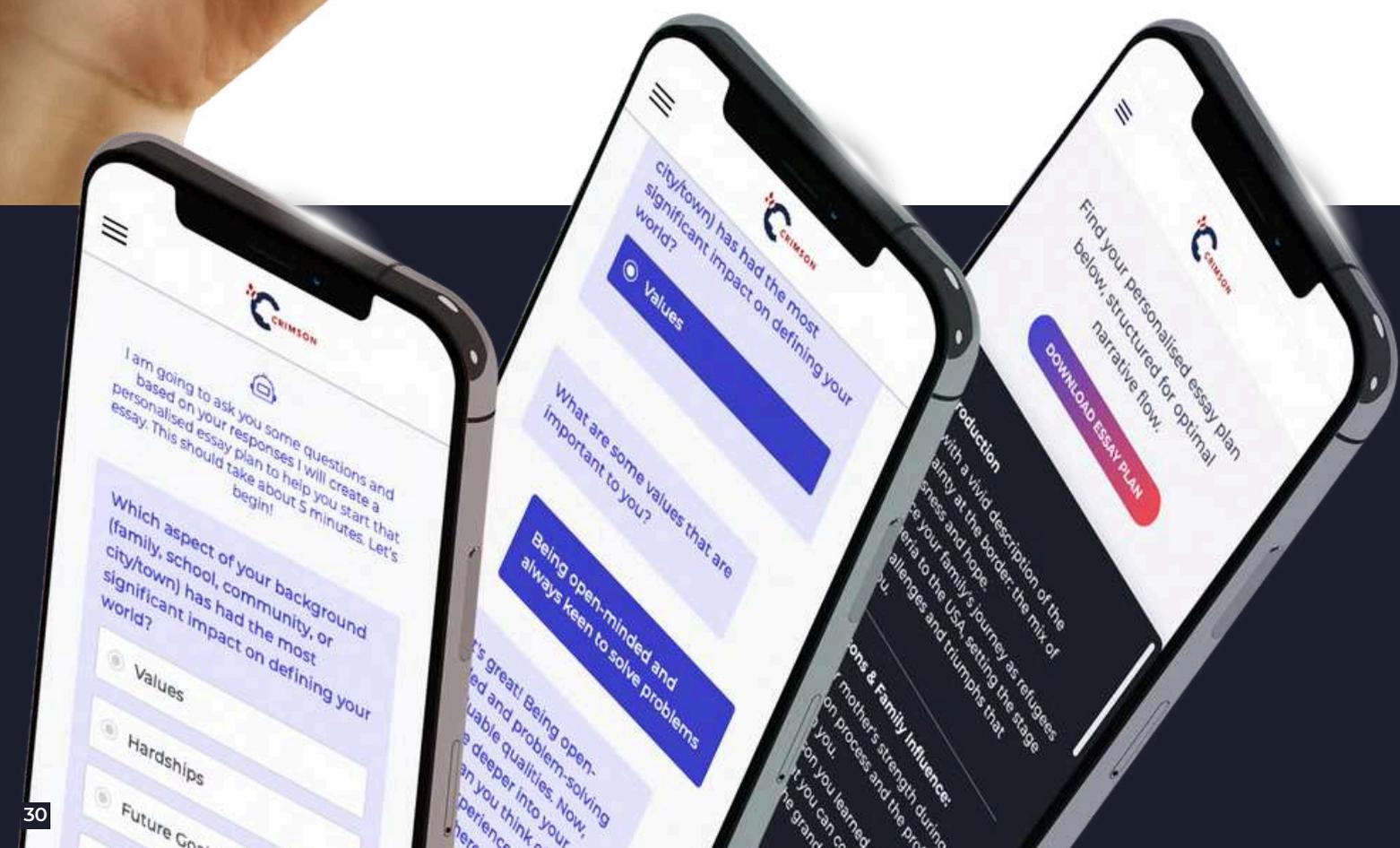


Technology to Connect the Dots

One of the biggest advantages Crimson offers is our cutting-edge technology that supports students throughout their journey. Our exclusive Crimson App serves as a hub for personalised learning and application management.

The Crimson App is designed with one goal in mind—helping you achieve your dream university admission. It allows you to create customised learning plans, track your progress, and access a wealth of resources at your fingertips. Whether you're preparing for standardised tests, completing essays, or managing your extracurricular schedule, the app ensures that nothing is left to chance.

With the Crimson App, you have a powerful tool to connect every part of your preparation, helping you to stay organised, focused, and fully prepared. It's more than just an app—it's your personal roadmap to success, backed by the expertise of Crimson's world-class mentors and strategists.



Proven Success: Crimson's Track Record

Crimson's expertise and high-level support have consistently led to exceptional results for our students. By partnering with Crimson, you position yourself to achieve similar success.

1000+

Offers to Ivy League Universities

6,360+

Offers to the US Top 50 universities

2,090+

Offers to the US Top 20 universities

294

Offers to Oxford and Cambridge

2,370+

Offers to the UK Top 10 universities



Pedro

Crimson Students

Crimson Student Admissions Rates Compared to General Applicant Rates (2024)

University	General Admit Rate	Crimson Admit Rate	Times Better
Harvard	3.59%	13%	3.6x
Princeton	~3.8%	16%	4.2x
Yale	3.7%	16%	4.3x
Columbia	3.8%	25.8%	6.8x
UPenn	~5.3%	23.8%	4.5x
Brown	5.2%	20.9%	4x
Cornell	~7.5%	24%	3.2x
Dartmouth	5.3%	19.5%	3.7x
MIT	4.52%	11.5%	2.5x
Stanford	~3.8%	17.6%	4.7x
Duke	5.1%	25.6%	5x
Johns Hopkins	~6.2%	30.2%	4.9x
Northwestern	~7.5%	21.5%	2.9x
UChicago	~4.9%	22.2%	4.5x
UC Berkeley	~10.8%	26%	2.4x
UCLA	~8.7%	28%	3.2x



How do Crimson students compare to international averages?

4.3x

More likely to gain acceptance to the Ivy League compared to the average general applicant.



Kiera

Crimson Student

1.3-3x

More likely to get accepted into Oxford or Cambridge compared to the average general applicant



Michael

Crimson Student

Ivy League

~4.7%

The average acceptance rate of general applicants who applied to the Ivy League

VS.

20% ↑

The average acceptance rate of **Crimson students** who applied to the Ivy League

US Top 20

~5.6%

The average acceptance rate of general applicants who applied to the US Top 20

VS.

21% ↑

The average acceptance rate of **Crimson students** who applied to the US Top 20



10 YEARS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

09.

From Aspiring to Accepted: The Crimson Effect

We don't just talk a big game—we deliver. We're proud to showcase 10 unique examples of how Crimson's expertise has been fundamental in transforming the journeys of students from all walks of life.

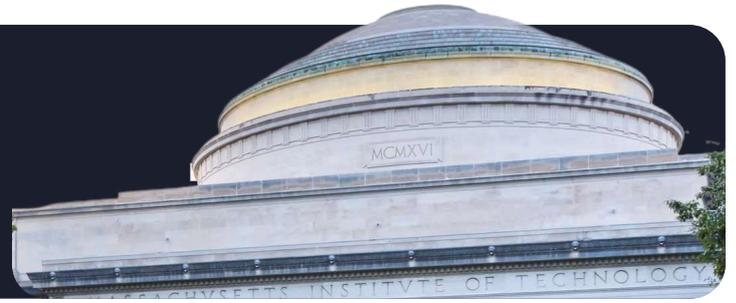
The Crimson Effect is about helping students become the best versions of themselves. These stories highlight the diverse successes of students who, through our personalised approach, achieved this. Whether they were already excelling or needed guidance to reach new heights, our support made the difference in their applications and helped them secure places at top-tier universities.

Ready to see the difference?



Jasper

MIT



Before Crimson

- Jasper had a strong background in music, having played the cello in his school's orchestra. While excelling in his academic subjects such as Math and literature, his extracurriculars were primarily music-related, which posed a challenge when he decided to apply to STEM-focused schools like MIT.
- Lacking a STEM-focused extracurricular portfolio, Jasper knew he needed to significantly shift his activities and achievements toward science and technology. With little time left in his high school career, he struggled to find a way to build a compelling STEM profile that would align with the high expectations of MIT.
- Unsure how to transition from his music-oriented profile to a STEM-focused application, Jasper sought Crimson's help to turn things around in less than a year.

- The team approach gave Jasper the support he needed to organise his application, stay on track with deadlines, and present a cohesive narrative despite his initial lack of STEM-related activities.

✓ Creating a strategic plan

✓ Developing capstone project

✓ Presenting a cohesive narrative



Working with Crimson

- Jasper's strategist, Jason, helped him create a strategic plan to shift his focus toward STEM. Together, they built a portfolio from scratch, identifying opportunities for Jasper to engage in STEM-related activities and projects that could bolster his application.
- ECL Mentor Khoo guided Jasper in developing his capstone project, creating a mini-curriculum that enabled him to overcome technical challenges and build a standout STEM project. Khoo's support in brainstorming and addressing technical obstacles allowed Jasper to transform his profile into one that aligned with MIT's STEM focus.
- Essay Mentor David provided in-depth feedback and guidance on Jasper's personal statement, helping him express his transition from a music-focused student to one passionate about STEM. David's detailed comments and creative brainstorming sessions helped Jasper articulate this shift in a compelling way, ensuring his essays captured his growth and ambition.

After Crimson

Jasper was admitted to MIT, ranked #2 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"The best aspect of Crimson for me was the personalised team that I had the opportunity to work with on a personal level. Each member brought unique points of view to the table and helped make my portfolio cohesive. Aside from Crimson's comprehensive approach to counselling, I am especially grateful to my strategist, who would bend over backwards to help me when the rest of the Crimson team was busy.

My strategist, Jason, helped me with the entire process (including choosing schools, mentors, etc.) and worked tirelessly to build up my portfolio, essentially from ground zero in less than one year, as I had nothing whatsoever related to STEM."



Alex

Cornell University



Before Crimson

- Alex grew up with a passion for sports, particularly soccer and skiing. His involvement in these activities not only fuelled his competitive spirit but also ingrained essential values of teamwork and dedication.
- Alex attended a ski academy from 8th grade, where he transitioned from a large middle school to a close-knit community of student-athletes. This environment helped him balance his academic and athletic pursuits but also highlighted the need for enhanced academic support to align with his Ivy League aspirations.
- Despite his strong athletic background, Alex recognised the necessity of academic support to strengthen his profile for top universities, including Cornell.

- The most significant advantage of working with Crimson was the dedicated commitment of each team member to Alex's success. The personalised support and shared enthusiasm for his goals played a key role in his achievement.

✓ Developing a realistic university list

✓ Creating a meaningful passion project

✓ Bridge the gap between his athletic focus and academic goals



Working with Crimson

- Alex first heard about Crimson through the need to balance his athletic achievements with strong academic performance. His family sought a consultancy to bridge the gap between his athletic focus and academic goals, with Crimson's comprehensive support standing out as the best option.
- Alex's strategist, George, helped him develop a realistic college list that aligned with his ambitions as a scholar and athlete. George's encouragement and practical advice were crucial in shaping Alex's application strategy.
- His ECL Mentor, Taylah, assisted Alex in creating a meaningful passion project—a Fentanyl Awareness Campaign. Taylah's support included editing materials and organising his thoughts, ensuring the project effectively highlighted Alex's commitment and leadership.
- Essay mentor Zachary provided invaluable help in organising Alex's ideas and refining his essays. Zachary's feedback and assistance with word count issues were instrumental in crafting compelling essays that met application requirements.

After Crimson

Alex Chen was admitted to Cornell University, ranked #12 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"Crimson helped me curate an application that highlighted my strengths within a story that positively marketed me as a student, athlete, and overall person that any university would feel confident in choosing to admit."



Cora

Yale & Oxford University



Before Crimson

- Cora had a diverse and rich upbringing, moving frequently across the East Coast and spending summers in Canada. She thrived academically and creatively, excelling in subjects like Math while pursuing artistic interests such as pottery, ballet, and singing.
- Cora faced a significant challenge in managing her applications to both top US universities and Oxford University in the UK. Each system had its own unique requirements, and she needed tailored strategies for both to maximise her chances of success.
- Initially, Cora relied on her father for college guidance, but the complexity of the application process strained their relationship, leading her family to seek expert help from Crimson to ensure she would stand out in the competitive admissions landscape.



Working with Crimson

- Cora's strategist, Aidan, was instrumental in guiding her through the distinct demands of US and UK applications. He helped refine her college list, ensured that she understood the key differences in presenting herself to US and UK admissions committees, and provided reassurance during this stressful process.
- Aidan also worked closely with Cora to ensure her application was cohesive across the different countries. For her US applications, this involved structuring her extracurriculars and leadership roles to showcase her community involvement and intellectual curiosity. For her Oxford application, the focus shifted toward academic excellence and subject mastery.
- Crimson's Essay Mentors provided support for both her US and UK personal statements, helping Cora craft narratives that reflected her personality and strengths. Their feedback ensured that each application was tailored to the specific requirements of each institution, whether highlighting extracurriculars for US universities or academic passion for Oxford.

- Crimson App, our all-in-one platform, helped Cora stay organised, providing tools for managing essay deadlines, interview preparation, and resume creation — vital in ensuring her applications were polished and professional.

✓ Crafting applications for both US & UK universities

✓ Developing distinct personal statements for US & UK

✓ Structuring extracurriculars & leadership roles

After Crimson

Cora was admitted to both Yale University in the US and the University of Oxford in the UK, demonstrating her success in navigating the unique demands of two different application processes. This achievement showcased the effectiveness of Crimson's expert guidance and strategic support in helping Cora manage her ambitious goals.

"The best thing about working with Crimson is that everything you need for your applications is in one place: essay drafting, application review, test prep, interview prep, and more. When one of my college applications required a resume, it was a Crimson webinar that helped me to turn my bullet point list into a professional document which I can use to apply to internships in the future."



Mia

University of Chicago



Before Crimson

- Mia was passionate about learning from a young age, especially in Math, but faced a slow start in high school due to remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As she entered her sophomore year, Mia began to excel academically and engage more in extracurricular activities, yet struggled with balancing a demanding course load with her extracurricular pursuits, particularly in healthcare.
- Mia needed to manage a rigorous academic schedule while pursuing various extracurricular activities, including volunteering, interning at a local hospital, conducting independent research, and leading projects to raise awareness about heart disease.

✓ Creating a structured plan

✓ ACT tutoring

✓ Developing a tailored extracurricular plan

✓ Strengthening essay



Working with Crimson

- Mia's strategist, Janela, helped her select appropriate classes and extracurricular activities, creating a structured plan to manage her academic and career-oriented goals effectively.
- Crimson provided ACT preparation through practice tests and review sessions with a tutor, helping Mia stay on track and manage test-related stress.
- Support from Crimson included advice on pursuing independent research, joining summer programmes, and starting a club, aligning Mia's extracurriculars with her healthcare aspirations to strengthen her application.
- Essay Mentor Elmira assisted Mia in brainstorming, editing, and refining her essays, offering valuable feedback and ensuring her essays effectively highlighted her strengths.
- The Crimson app with chat options enabled Mia and her parents to quickly get answers to questions, reducing stress and providing timely support throughout the application process.

After Crimson

Mia was admitted to the University of Chicago, ranked #12 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"Crimson greatly helped my admission into college, and I would definitely not be here if it were not for them. Crimson helped me frame myself in the best way possible to all of the competitive colleges."



Paige

Northwestern University



Before Crimson

- Paige, from Dallas, Texas, attended an all-girls' private school from pre-K through her senior year, excelling in academic subjects like Math, Latin, economics, and computer science. She took eight AP courses at school and pursued two more independently, but despite her strong academic record, Paige needed help shaping a competitive college application.
- Alongside her academics, Paige's standout extracurricular activity was artistic swimming, where she dedicated 20 hours a week over nine years. Her achievements included representing the United States at the Pan American Championships, securing multiple international gold medals, and consistently winning national titles in US competitions. These accomplishments established her as an elite international athlete.
- Despite her impressive record in artistic swimming and academics, Paige needed guidance on how to tie these achievements into a cohesive narrative that would stand out in the highly competitive college admissions process.

Working with Crimson

- Paige's strategist, April, helped her craft a thoughtful and strategic approach to her applications, making Northwestern University stand out as a great choice. Northwestern's reputation for valuing interdisciplinary interests, particularly in fields like Math, economics, and cognitive science, made it an ideal match for Paige's varied academic and extracurricular pursuits.
- April worked with Paige to structure 3 to 4 key extracurricular activities that aligned with her academic passions, including independent research on anxiety and depression in artistic swimmers, essay contests, science competitions, tutoring, and publishing papers. This approach provided a unified narrative that showcased Paige's dedication to both her academic and personal growth.

- Crimson's team also guided Paige in selecting summer programs that supported her long-term academic interests, further reinforcing her commitment to interdisciplinary learning.
- Her essay mentor, Ginny, provided detailed feedback on her essays, ensuring that Paige's narratives were compelling and aligned with Northwestern's emphasis on broad academic engagement.

✓ **Crafting a thoughtful and strategic approach**

✓ **Developing a strategic extracurricular plan**

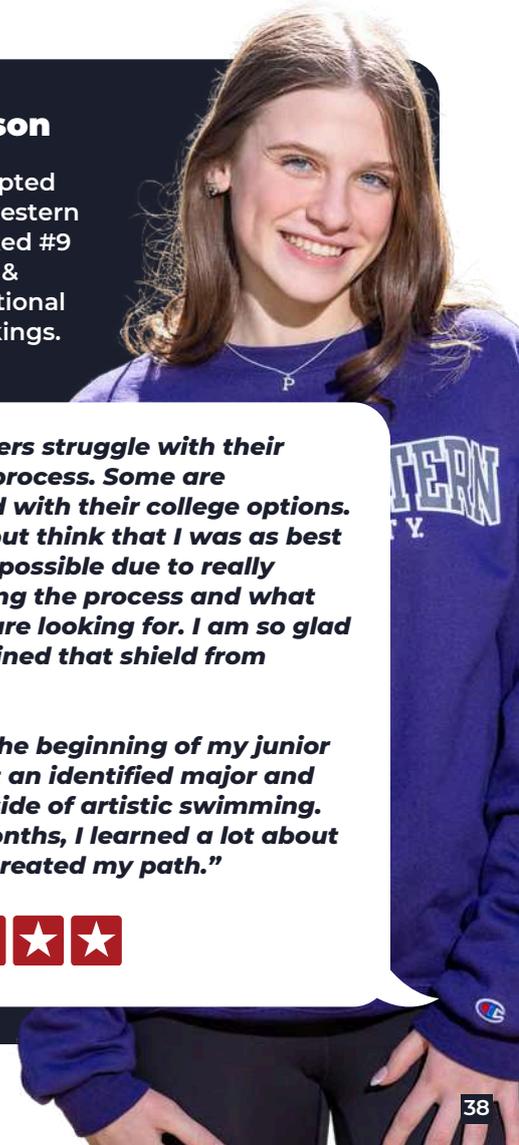
✓ **Creating a cohesive personal narrative**

After Crimson

Paige was accepted early to Northwestern University, ranked #9 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

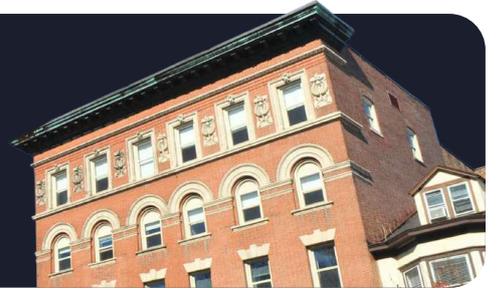
"I watch others struggle with their application process. Some are disappointed with their college options. I can't help but think that I was as best prepared as possible due to really understanding the process and what admissions are looking for. I am so glad to have attained that shield from Crimson.

I started at the beginning of my junior year without an identified major and few ECs outside of artistic swimming. Within 16 months, I learned a lot about myself and created my path."



Abigail

Princeton University



Before Crimson

- Abigail, from Arizona, was an ambitious student with a passion for learning, founding the Challenge Success club and becoming president of the Dreamcatchers club. However, despite her strong extracurricular involvement, she struggled with effectively showcasing her leadership and academic achievements in a cohesive application.
- Abigail faced the challenge of balancing multiple AP courses and extracurriculars while needing to present a compelling narrative that aligned with Princeton's expectations of intellectual curiosity, leadership, and community engagement.
- Having to adapt to virtual learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic added another layer of complexity to her high school experience, leaving her unsure about how to stand out in the competitive university admissions process.

Working with Crimson

- Abigail's strategist, Alisha, provided essential support by helping her develop a clear application strategy, including refining her college list and setting achievable deadlines. Alisha's guidance ensured that Abigail stayed organised throughout the process and understood how to present herself as a cohesive candidate.
- Essay Mentor Theo helped Abigail overcome writer's block and taught her the formula for writing strong college essays. Together, they brainstormed creative ideas, and Theo's detailed feedback enabled Abigail to craft essays that reflected her strengths and aspirations, significantly improving her writing skills.
- Abigail needed help articulating her leadership roles and extracurricular achievements within word count limitations. Alisha worked with her to write effective descriptions, ensuring they highlighted her impact and leadership in a compelling way.

- Crimson provided crucial resources, typically reserved for high-income students, which gave Abigail an edge in planning ahead and optimising her applications well before her senior year.

✓ Refining college list

✓ Setting achievable deadlines

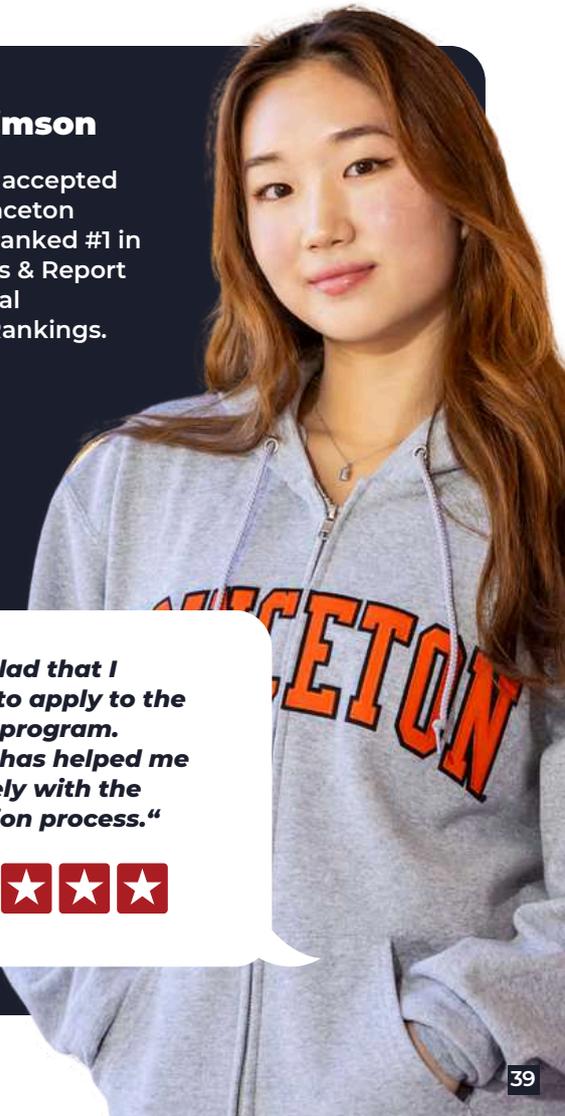
✓ Improving writing skills

✓ Crimson provided crucial resources

After Crimson

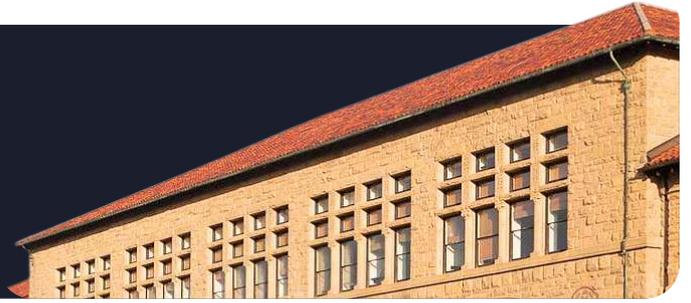
Abigail was accepted early to Princeton University, ranked #1 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"I'm so glad that I decided to apply to the Crimson program. Crimson has helped me immensely with the application process."



Alejandra

Harvard & Stanford University



Before Crimson

- Alejandra, from Los Angeles, CA, grew up in a multi-generational household, raised primarily by her single mother with the support of her grandparents. From a young age, Alejandra was driven by her entrepreneurial spirit and a deep interest in STEM, particularly computer science.
- In high school, Alejandra was heavily involved in a variety of STEM-related extracurricular activities, such as leading the Programming Motion team for InvenTeam, co-leading her school's Robotics team, and participating in STEM advocacy panels. She also worked part-time while caring for her grandfather, all while pursuing academic excellence.
- Despite her impressive achievements, Alejandra lacked confidence in her writing skills and felt overwhelmed by the task of writing over 50 supplemental essays. She feared that her essays wouldn't stand out in an increasingly competitive admissions landscape, particularly as her school did not offer AP courses, leaving her uncertain about how to differentiate herself academically.



Working with Crimson

- Alejandra's strategist, Nathaly, helped her craft a balanced college list, ensuring it included a mix of reach, target, and likely schools. Nathaly played a crucial role in building Alejandra's confidence, particularly when it came to applying to top-tier institutions, and kept her organised with deadlines and essay planning.
- Nathaly also provided detailed feedback on Alejandra's extracurricular descriptions, helping her refine and highlight her leadership roles and STEM accomplishments. This guidance was crucial in shaping Alejandra's application to be cohesive and impactful.
- Crimson's support alleviated Alejandra's anxiety about her writing, providing her with the tools and confidence to tackle the numerous supplemental essays and present her authentic self in each application.

- Alejandra's essay mentor, Rhiannon, provided personalised support throughout the essay-writing process. Although Alejandra had strong ideas for her personal statement, Rhiannon helped her articulate them effectively, turning her thoughts into eloquent, concise essays. Rhiannon's continuous feedback ensured that Alejandra's essays were polished and reflective of her unique story and passions.

✓ **Crafting balanced college list**

✓ **Shaping a cohesive and impactful application**

✓ **Improving her writing skills**

✓ **Personalised support throughout the essay-writing process**

After Crimson

Alejandra was admitted to Harvard and Stanford University, both ranked #3 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"The best thing about working with Crimson was the consistent support from my essay mentor, Rhiannon. I was so lucky that she was always available to help me with my essays, whether it was for any major or minor changes."



Alex

University of Notre Dame



Before Crimson

- Alex, from northern Kentucky, attended an all-male Catholic high school where his early years were shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting his involvement in extracurricular activities. Despite the disruptions, he found solace and community through the school's game club and eventually became its president.
- As high school progressed, Alex joined the National English Honor Society, where he served as treasurer, and led his school's robotics team. While he was dedicated to his academic work and extracurriculars, Alex faced the challenge of presenting his leadership roles and achievements in a way that would stand out in a competitive admissions process, especially for a prestigious school like the University of Notre Dame.
- Unsure how to effectively highlight his leadership and balance his involvement across activities, Alex and his family sought Crimson's support to craft a strong, cohesive college application.

✓ **Staying on track with deadlines**

✓ **Making his essays compelling and reflective**

✓ **Presenting a well-rounded application**

After Crimson

Alex was admitted to the University of Notre Dame, ranked #20 in the US News rankings, a reflection of how Crimson's strategic support helped him transform his experiences and passions into a standout application for one of the most prestigious Catholic universities in the country.

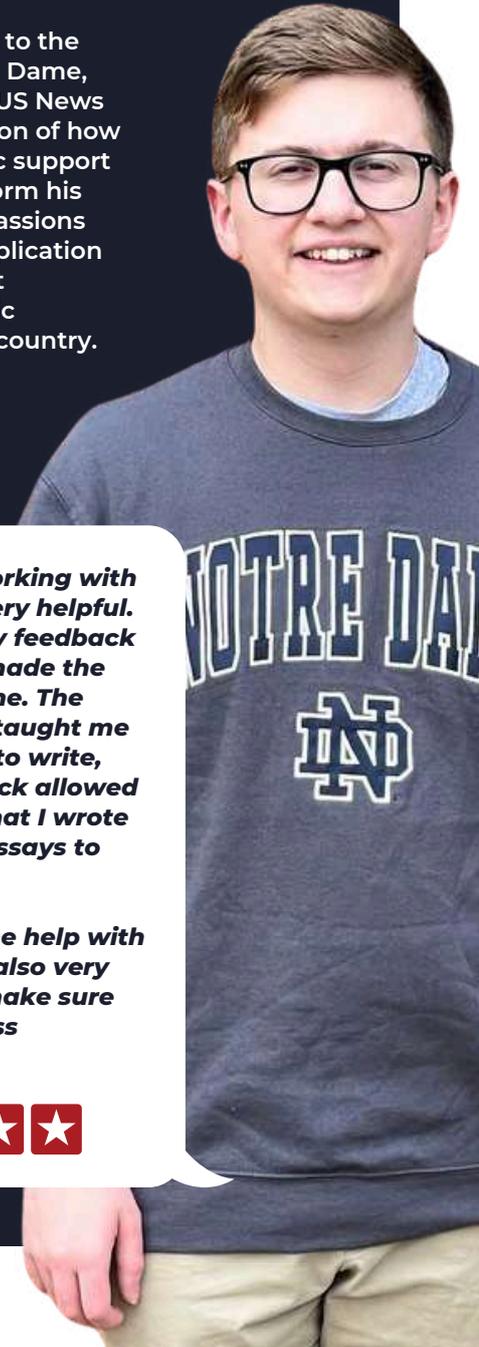
"I think that working with Crimson was very helpful. Crimson's essay feedback is what really made the difference for me. The essay tutoring taught me what and how to write, and the feedback allowed me to refine what I wrote and tailor my essays to each school."

Having someone help with deadlines was also very reassuring to make sure that I didn't miss anything."



Working with Crimson

- Alex's strategist, Jordan, worked closely with him to ensure he stayed on track with deadlines, providing crucial support in setting up his Common App and refining his application. Jordan helped Alex polish his activity summaries, ensuring they captured the depth of his leadership roles and impact within the limited word count.
- Crimson's essay review was a game-changer for Alex. He received valuable feedback from his essay mentor, who helped him refine his narrative, making his essays compelling and reflective of his personal values and commitment to service — qualities Notre Dame looks for in applicants.
- With Crimson's guidance, Alex was able to present a well-rounded application that balanced his academic achievements, leadership roles, and extracurricular activities in a way that showcased his alignment with Notre Dame's mission of faith, intellect, and community.



Ziyan

Johns Hopkins University



Before Crimson

- Ziyan, originally from ShiJiaZhuang, China, immigrated to the United States at age 5 and grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her childhood was shaped by a congenital heart defect that limited her ability to participate in physical activities, leading her to develop a passion for reading and academics from an early age.
- In high school, Ziyan thrived in the highly competitive environment of a large public school, participating in Model United Nations, Speech and Debate, and several internships. While she was involved in a range of activities, from music to advocacy, she struggled to create a cohesive narrative that showcased her diverse interests and achievements in a way that would stand out to selective universities.
- Faced with the challenge of refining her extracurricular activities and application essays to reflect her strengths and passions, Ziyan and her family turned to Crimson for expert guidance.

- Ziyan's essay mentor, Debory, provided consistent feedback on her essays, helping her overcome writer's block and brainstorm creative approaches to the prompts. Debory's guidance enabled Ziyan to craft essays that not only reflected her unique background and challenges but also conveyed her intellectual curiosity and passion for STEM.
- Crimson's support helped Ziyan feel more confident in her application, turning her diverse interests into a compelling story that aligned with the values and academic rigour of Johns Hopkins.

✓ Shaping application strategy

✓ Refining extracurricular and leadership descriptions

✓ Providing consistent feedback on essays

Working with Crimson

- Ziyan's strategist, April, was key in shaping her application strategy by encouraging her to apply through ED2, the second round of Early Decision, which allows students to apply to a top-choice school with a binding commitment. While Ziyan was initially unfamiliar with ED2 and the advantages it offered compared to Regular Decision (RD), April provided detailed guidance on how applying early could significantly boost her chances at Johns Hopkins. This decision played a pivotal role in her acceptance.
- In addition to this strategic decision, April helped Ziyan refine her extracurricular and leadership descriptions, ensuring her application presented a cohesive narrative. By polishing her essays and ECL (Extracurricular and Leadership) sections, April helped Ziyan present herself as a well-rounded, competitive candidate for highly selective universities.

After Crimson

Ziyan was accepted to Johns Hopkins University through the ED2 decision cycle, ranked #9 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"I am extremely grateful for Crimson's help as it was a big part in my acceptance at my university. Their expert guidance, especially from my strategist and my essay mentor, really helped me stand out as an applicant."



Keith

University of Pennsylvania



Before Crimson

- Keith was born in Bangalore, India, and moved to the United States at the age of 5. Growing up, he developed a passion for music, playing piano for nearly 15 years. In high school, he discovered his strengths in the humanities and social sciences, excelling in speech and debate and competing at major tournaments like the CA State Tournament, the Tournament of Champions, and tournaments at Harvard, Stanford, and Penn.
- Alongside his debate accomplishments, Keith held leadership roles as Class President, worked on school district policy, and competed in varsity wrestling. Despite his diverse achievements, Keith faced the challenge of tying together his academic strengths and leadership roles into a cohesive narrative that would stand out to top universities.
- Unsure how to position his wide-ranging experiences into a compelling application, Keith and his family turned to Crimson for support in creating a strong, clear strategy.

- Keith's essay mentor, Matt, was particularly influential. Matt's deep knowledge of writing and storytelling helped Keith transform his essays from good to exceptional. Keith credits Matt with pushing him to reflect more deeply and ask important questions that allowed him to refine his narrative. This process helped Keith develop essays that not only showcased his academic and leadership achievements but also presented his personal story in a compelling and authentic way.
- Beyond essays, Keith worked with his ECL Mentor, Nabila, to develop his capstone project — a youth-based think tank. Nabila helped him brainstorm the project, refine its focus, and manage logistics like outside support, funding, and website design. She also helped Keith diversify his extracurricular profile by identifying additional activities and essay contests that rounded out his application.

✓ Making his essays compelling and authentic

Working with Crimson

- Keith's strategist, Dakota, was instrumental in helping him craft a strategic college list that included universities like UPenn and liberal arts colleges Keith hadn't previously considered. Dakota guided him through the ED/REA (Early Decision/Restricted Early Action) process, helping Keith make a strategic decision about where to apply early. This advice allowed Keith to maximise his chances of acceptance.
- Dakota also played a key role in keeping Keith on track, following up when deadlines approached and providing ongoing essay support. In addition to the help from his essay mentor, Dakota's consistent availability helped ensure Keith's application was polished and ready on time.

✓ Crafting a strategic college list

After Crimson

Keith was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania, ranked #6 in the US News & Report Best National University Rankings.

"Crimson was absolutely the right choice, and played a big role in my success. Between the essay support, SAT support, and the general counselling and school choice, they were helpful in every step of the process. We're very, very glad that we went with Crimson!"



Starting Your Journey With CRIMSON

01

Discovering the educational goals

In our free initial consultation with the Academic Advisor, we will get to know the student's interests, goals, and strengths.

While the Academic Advisor is there to understand the student's academic goals and aspirations, the family can ask as many questions as they like in return!



02

Identifying the strengths and weaknesses

Now that we've discussed the student's goals and aspirations, it's time to evaluate the student's odds of admission to their initial preferred university choices.

Based on the student's profile, a personalised program tailored to their individual strengths and weaknesses is built.

Examples:

- ✓ Extracurricular Mentoring
- ✓ Application Strategy
- ✓ Test Prep
- ✓ Essay Prep
- ✓ Best-fit University Selection



YOU WITH CRIMSON



04

Success!

It's time to take action! With the Crimson team by the student's side, they can start their journey to acceptance at the best universities in the world!



03

Generating the unique game plan

At Crimson, we don't believe in the adage that 'one size fits all.'

Instead, we design a personalised programme tailored to each student's individual strengths and weaknesses. Every student's journey at Crimson looks unique.

Following the consultation, we will develop a customised Crimson programme for the student, taking into account their academic goals and budget.

Once the student is satisfied with their individually crafted programme, their educational journey begins!



10 YEARS OF STUDENT SUCCESS

Ready to Get Started?

[Talk to Us](#)

[CRIMSONEDUCATION.ORG](https://www.crimsoneducation.org)