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THINGS ADMISSION OFFICERS STRESS ABOUT

The Strategic Edge of InitialView Interviews

By
Gloria Crawford
Co-founder and COO
InitialView.com



Gloria Crawford

"Never, ever, think about something else when you should be thinking about the power of incentives."

— Charlie Munger

Let's do a deep dive on how students can take advantage of InitialView, even for this RD cycle. But first, let's analyze the pressures on admissions officers at top colleges. They are under pressure because they want to avoid mistakes like (1) admitting someone who isn't right for the institution, and (2) admitting someone who doesn't come.

Mistake #1: If they admit someone who won't thrive at their school, then they will have given a valuable space to someone who won't contribute to the culture of the institution, who won't graduate in four years, who won't tell others about how great their school was, who won't use their time at the school as a springboard to greater achievement, and who won't someday as alumni give their money to the institution. In other words, the opportunity cost of admitting someone who isn't right for their institution is high—much higher than just the amount of their tuition.

As a result, admissions officers are constantly asking themselves not just "Is this student qualified?", but rather "Will they thrive at our institution?" In fact, admissions officers at selective colleges say that 80–90% of applicants are "academically qualified". Instead they ask questions like: Will the student be comfortable among other leaders? Does the student truly love to learn? Do they have passions that align with those already at our institution?

Of course, you know the tools admissions officers typically use: the high school transcript (grades and course rigor), the high school profile, test scores, recommendation letters, essays (in that order of importance). But note: these tools have limitations in answering the questions above since they all are filtered through a third party. Sometimes it's hard to judge the extent to which that third party should be trusted.

This is one benefit to InitialView. It's just you. It's not what someone said about you or what someone wrote about you or how a test measured you. After all, admissions officers are admitting you, not the others who might have been involved in your application, and they want as clear a picture as they can get—because they want to admit someone who will thrive.

Mistake #2: Let's continue to look at incentives that impact admissions officers.

Consider first the key broad admissions metrics that admissions offices focus on each year. One, they look at the total number of applications they receive. An increase in applications makes admissions officers' bosses—i.e., college presidents—feel good, so naturally admissions officers want lots of applications.

Second, they look at selectivity, usually demonstrated by an admit rate. Ironically, admissions offices increase selectivity by rejecting as many applicants as possible. In other words, a college wants your student's application, but they don't want your student. That may sound harsh, but we humans tend to think that if something is more selective then it is more valuable, and the college admissions process simply reflects this human tendency.

Colleges are like a hotel that has only so many rooms. They want to fill the rooms, but if they let in too many people, there won't be enough "rooms" (either literally in the sense of dorm rooms or more figuratively in the terms of resources like classes) to go around. So the trick for colleges is to estimate the true interest of each applicant in their respective college. Admissions officers do this by evaluating "demonstrated interest", which is a behind-the-scenes calculation you never get to see. It typically involves mining data about applicant behavior during the admissions process: Did the applicant visit campus? Does the applicant open emails? Did the applicant come to an info session? When an admissions office is at the last stage of the process, something called "sculpting" their class, they will be asking more generally, is this student in the category of students to typically say yes if we admit them?

Some schools will say they don't measure "demonstrated interest", but I would posture that all do to some extent. Here's a thought experiment: What if in one of your essays you accidentally include the name of another college? Do you think they would let you in? Almost certainly not. That would be an easy reject. At a minimum, students who spend more time researching a school, attending online events, paying thorough attention to requirements and optional supplements often produce a better application and admissions officers can see that.

InitialView helps you demonstrate your interest in a convincing way by giving each student during regular decision two "virtual stars" to assign to two of their top colleges. This is convincing because while you can send your interview to as many colleges as you want, you only get two stars. We can see from data that an InitialView interview tends to help (this is likely because dud applicants don't send their InitialView materials, so an interview helps prevent mistake #1), and then that one with a star really helps.

If you're applying RD, InitialView is probably your best way to stand out in the crowded pool. When you do an InitialView interview, the decision tree is simple: first If you're happy with your interview, just send it everywhere. If you're not happy with it, then you don't have to send it. Second, be thoughtful about your two stars. That's it. Even at RD, the best way to increase your chances is to help admissions officers avoid mistakes.

*Gloria Chyou Crawford, a graduate of Wellesley College and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, is the COO and Co-founder of InitialView, a world leader in using video to make connections between students and admissions officers. Students from over 150 countries have participated in an InitialView interview and submitted their interviews and writing samples to over 400 colleges and universities in the United States over the past decade. To learn more, visit https://initialview.com/for_applicants



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HARVARD RECOMMENDS GAP YEARS - HERE'S WHY YOU SHOULD TOO

How a Planned Year Off Can Enhance Your University Journey

By
Farhad Anklesaria
Head, India
Based: London And Delhi
Baret Scholars



Farhad Anklesaria

Recently, more and more students are taking gap years. For those unfamiliar with the concept, traditional gap years are when graduating high school students take a year-long break in between high school and University. Gap years are overwhelmingly beneficial to students: and now there's evidence and experience to back this up. In a study done by Middlebury College, students who took gap years had higher GPAs in college, took on more leadership roles, and had better mental health.

Prestigious Universities also encourage students to take gap years. As William Fitzsimmons, Harvard's Dean of Admissions shares "Perhaps the best way of all to get the full benefit of a "time-off" is to postpone entrance to college for a year. For more than four decades, Harvard has recommended this option, indeed proposing it in the letter of admission". Though Harvard recommends that it's incoming freshmen take a year off - not all gap years are created equal. It's the structured, well planned, curated gap years that make all the difference, and we're going to tell you why.

Many students take unstructured gap years. They might backpack around Europe or South East Asia or volunteer in a school in India. While these gap years are fun and expose students to a region of the world and are often crash courses in budgeting 101, they are much more an exercise in independence than in education.

Students who take structured gap years have a more rounded experience - with guidance, learning, skill development, and personal growth. Students also travel in groups where safety and security is paramount and well thought out. Baret Scholars, where students are offered the opportunity to live in seven different regions of the world in seven months, is a new gap year program. It's an amalgamation of curation and freedom, that brings together the two poles of a gap year experience - structure and independent exploration.

Below are some of the benefits of taking a well curated, structured gap year:

Global and local experiences

A well structured gap year will place you in a variety of regions - not just one. Having a global experience allows a student to compare, contrast, and bring a real breadth of experience and knowledge to their college seminars. Additionally, future employers would value this global experience and feel more comfortable placing the candidate in different geographies. The ability to adapt to different geographies is a valuable skill to build in an ever increasingly interconnected world.

Friendships and mentoring

A structured gap year brings together like minded students and expert mentors to create a supportive environment to explore the world. Structured programs create a strong sense of belonging and community that ensures student camaraderie and safety. The shared experiences that are created during this year create long lasting friendships and connections that extend far beyond the gap year itself.

Well researched route and educational options for students

Planning a gap year can be overwhelming and involve months of research and organization. A structured gap year takes the guesswork out of planning and provides a well organized tried and tested educational experience for students. Instead of focusing on endless planning and logistics, students can focus on being present in the experience itself.

Transition to college

Taking a structured gap year eases students into University life. It helps students transition into their futures by creating opportunities for exploration and independence in a supportive communal environment without the constraints of stress inducing University courses and exams.

Clarity, motivation, self knowledge, mental health

The combination of exploration and independence creates opportunities for personal and professional growth. When students step out of their comfort zone, they are rewarded with self discovery and self knowledge and leave with a stronger sense of mental clarity and purpose. This enhanced mental well-being becomes a powerful asset to students as they navigate the challenges of University life.

Structured gap years are a powerful investment in personal and academic development. By taking on a gap year and living in different regions of the world, students will gain a first hand global perspective that puts them at an advantage in today's increasingly interconnected world. When students embark on a structured gap year, which is created specifically to support students' personal development in a safe and supportive environment, they are left better prepared for their University years and beyond.

With a strong focus on research and practical application of knowledge, the University of Mannheim continuously contributes to advancements in various academic disciplines. Its international outlook is underscored by numerous collaborations and exchange programs, attracting a diverse student body and faculty from around the world. The University of Mannheim stands as a beacon of academic excellence, preparing students to meet the challenges of a rapidly evolving global landscape. All bachelor's degrees are taught in German.

Admission Eligibility

Admission in Germany depends largely on the academic credentials students have earned in India. Grade 12 Indian Board: Direct admission is only possible under special conditions (JEE Main and Advance rank obtained) for technical and natural sciences courses. IB Diploma and A-Levels: Direct admission is possible if the student has taken certain subjects in the IB or A-levels. One year of bachelor studies in India: Direct admission is possible for the same or similar degree course starting again in year 1. Foundation Year (Studienkolleg): Most students would be eligible for a foundation year in Germany. As it is taught entirely in German and students have to pass an exam at the end of the course, the language requirements are quite high.

German/English Language Proficiency

Research universities - Advanced C1 level required for admission. Universities of Applied Sciences - Intermediate B2 level required for admission. Some universities accept a lower level of proficiency at the time of application and require students to confirm their language proficiency when students enroll at the university. It is recommended to check the website of the university to which language proficiency tests are accepted for admission.

APS Certificate

The APS certificate is required for anyone applying with Indian academic qualifications. The Academic Evaluation Centre will issue a document, the APS certificate, after the successful authentication of the academic documents which is required to obtain a student visa in Germany.

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OBERLIN CONSERVATORY

Cultivating Musical Brilliance and Global Harmony

By

Ryan Dearon '18

Senior Assistant Director of Conservatory Admissions



Ryan Dearon '18

Recipient of the 2009 National Medal of Arts, Oberlin Conservatory of Music is the oldest continuously operating conservatory in America and is recognized as one of the foremost professional training institutions in the world. The Conservatory is also one of the few major music schools in the U.S. that shares its campus with a top-ranked liberal arts institution, Oberlin College of Arts and Sciences, and is devoted primarily to the education of undergraduate musicians.

The Conservatory prepares talented, intellectually gifted students for professional careers in music. Most Conservatory students pursue the Bachelor of Music degree, majoring in one or more of the 44 areas of study offered. Our majors encompass instrumental and vocal performance, historical performance, jazz studies, composition, Technology in Music and Related Arts (TIMARA), Recording Arts and Production, and musicology. One-third of the 600 students in the Conservatory also pursue an additional major in the College as part of Oberlin's five-year Double Degree Program, or they can choose to add a minor in any of Oberlin's academic, musical, or interdisciplinary programs.

A unique feature of Oberlin is the opportunity for students to chart their own course during Winter Term, a special session in the academic year that takes place between the fall and spring semesters during the month of January. These projects focus on a wide variety of experiences such as developing new skills, studying abroad in another country, researching a topic related to one's major, performing, or preparing for a future career.

The Conservatory's educational training is designed to foster deep understanding and insight into the arts, as well as the knowledge, skills, and technical competence essential for professional musicians. To this end, members of the Conservatory's internationally distinguished faculty are invested in teaching, mentorship, and professional performance. Central to our mission are the more than 500 performances and events Oberlin produces each year by Conservatory students and faculty, as well as by guest artists.

International students are an integral part of Oberlin's campus community, comprising between 10 to 15% of the combined College and Conservatory student population of approximately 3,000 students. Oberlin boasts resources that support and celebrate international cultures and identities. As a residential campus, all students live and dine with one another and may choose to reside in one of Oberlin's diverse housing options that support living communities based on language, identity, culture, and shared interests. Oberlin's Cooper International Learning Center supports the study of world languages while exploring cultures and considering new perspectives. A hub for students from diverse backgrounds, the Multicultural Resource Commons provides spaces for all to find belonging on campus, connecting with many of Oberlin's 175+ student organizations.

The effectiveness of an Oberlin Conservatory education can be measured by the success of its students and graduates. Among recent awards won by Conservatory students and alumni are the Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition grand prize, Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition first prize, Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition grand prize, Watson Fellowships, Marshall Scholarships, Fulbright Scholarships, and Annenberg Arts Fund Grants, as well as the Pulitzer Prize and MacArthur Fellowship. The Conservatory's Professional Development Office supports students through grants, funds, workshops, guest lectures, and classes in collaboration with the campus-wide Career Exploration and Development Office. Conservatory alumni have attained national and international stature as performers, conductors, composers, scholars, educators, and arts administrators.

Oberlin is committed to diversity and access and is fortunate to be one of a few American schools to offer need-based financial aid to international applicants. Oberlin offers a \$10,000 merit scholarship to every admitted student that enrolls, with additional funds available based upon the level of the audition or interview for Conservatory applicants. Oberlin is dedicated to expanding international student access with academic and financial support through a new partnership with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the Global Foundation for the Performing Arts (GFPA). With these resources, and in collaboration with our International Student and Scholar Services Office, Oberlin supports students throughout the application process to find their place amongst our amazing student body.

Learn more at www.oberlin.edu.

THE INVALUABLE BENEFITS OF INDEPENDENT RESEARCH FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

What Does AI Mean for the Future of Education?

By
Nika Hajikhodaverdikhan
The Admissions Team
Horizon Academic Research Program



Nika
Hajikhodaverdikhan

In the dynamic landscape of education, high school students often find themselves caught up in the whirlwind of standardized tests, coursework, and extracurricular activities. A unique alternative, or supplement, is to conduct independent research in high school – which can offer a myriad of benefits: fostering intellectual growth, equipping students for college applications and preparing them for the challenges of higher education, opening an avenue to receive recognition through publication, and developing critical skills.

Information Literacy, Critical Thinking, and Problem-Solving:

Independent research allows high schoolers to move beyond the constraints of a conventional classroom curriculum and explore the latest developments or trends within a field of personal interest. Research also teaches high school students how to navigate databases, evaluate sources, and discern between credible and unreliable information. Through this process of researching, students learn to ask meaningful questions, critically analyze information, and draw well-founded conclusions. Navigating the complexities of research equips them with the ability to approach problems with a logical and analytical mindset – a skill crucial for success in higher education and the professional world.

Uplifting College Applications:

Now that standardized tests are no longer mandatory for many leading universities, the completion of a research project is increasingly the element that sets a student apart from the rest of high school applicants when it comes to university admissions. With several Ivy League universities having gone test-optional, they (including Yale, Brown, and Columbia University) are encouraging students to submit research papers. In fact, the Dean of Admissions at the University of Pennsylvania confirmed that “nearly one-third of the admitted students engaged in academic research during their time in high school.” Students boost their candidacy by including their research manuscript as a supplementary document, which demonstrates university-level writing as well as commitment to their major. In this sense, research is unique compared to other competitive extracurriculars in its legibility. Admissions officers are able to extract the time, preparation, and discipline that was required from students as well as infer the skills and knowledge they possess – all from a single document. A strong research paper can also open up the opportunity for high schoolers to get published in a journal, present at an academic conference, or earn a letter of recommendation.

All in all, the benefits of conducting independent research in high school places students at an advantage in their academic and professional journey to success. Students are encouraged to find ways to get involved with research; for instance, STEM projects can try to take advantage of lab space at a local community college or reserve science classrooms after-school with the permission of high school teachers. Alternatively, students can search for applications for research assistant positions or form connections with relevant scholars in their field and reach out to contribute to their research. Though, needless to say, opportunities tend to be limited and it can certainly be difficult or confusing to get started. If students are unable to secure an avenue to research on their own, they may benefit from more structured programs, such as the Horizon Academic Research Program, which include tailored guidance from a well-trained mentor.

In an effort to try to democratize access to research opportunities, Horizon Academic offers high schoolers the opportunity to engage with topics they're interested in (from neuroscience and machine learning to economics, international relations, and more) alongside a professor while maintaining a level of academic rigor and excellence expected of undergraduates. High school students who apply to the program or embrace independent research on their own not only gain a deeper understanding of their chosen subjects but also lay the foundation for a lifetime of intellectual curiosity and achievement.



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5 CHALLENGES THAT STUDENTS GO THROUGH WHEN WRITING ESSAYS

An Insight from an Indian High School Counsellor

By
Rashi Ahuja Dixit
Career Counsellor and Study Abroad Advisor
IC3 Advocate, Mentor, Guidance Coach



Rashi Ahuja Dixit

Navigating the vibrant yet complex world of Indian academia is like taking a thrilling journey through a diverse landscape. As a high school counselor at one of India's most dynamic school networks, I have the privilege of observing these young minds navigate their academic odyssey, especially when it comes to writing essays. In the recent USA and UK application season- the scene in my office was both inspiring and entertaining. The students were huddled together writing, editing and revising their college essays and seeing them collaborate and inspire each other prompted me to analyse them as individuals and as a group that led me to the following finding that there are 5 key takeaways that the college counsellors should know about the Indian high schoolers essay writing journey

1. Racing in a Competitive Landscape

India, a vibrant tapestry of diverse cultures and traditions, is also home to an intensely competitive academic ecosystem. Here, the pursuit of excellence isn't just a journey; it's akin to a high-stakes race where even the brightest minds with GPAs north of 8.85 are in constant battle. The denominator of success in this competitive milieu is vast. The ability to thrive in such an environment requires not just a strong academic foundation, but also a high level of resilience and determination. One particular student, let's call him Ravi, was a shining star with academics and extracurriculars. Yet, he often felt like he was fighting an uphill battle, trying to stand out in a sea of equally talented peers. It was a testament to the fierce competition here, where the pursuit of excellence is akin to a high-stakes race.

2. Mastering Art of Self-Expression

Writing an essay is like painting a self-portrait. This task can often be daunting for Indian students who, due to cultural nuances, might shy away from openly expressing their achievements and aspirations. Our culture often teaches us to be humble, which can sometimes translate into a reluctance to showcase our accomplishments. This can lead to essays that are either too aspirational, bordering on the fantastical, or too pessimistic. It's an art that our students initially struggle with. Once, my student, Ashita, brought me an essay that was so aspirational; it seemed more like a fantasy novel than a personal statement. We worked on several drafts, chipping away the excess, adding a bit of color here, a dash of realism there. Gradually, Ashita learned to balance her humility with the assertiveness her story needed. Her final essay beautifully depicted her journey, achievements, and aspirations.

3. Cultivating Unique Voices

The role of every counselor is akin to a gardener, nurturing and cultivating the unique voices of young minds, extending beyond the realm of academic guidance. As a counselor, I serve as a mentor and sounding board, helping to foster the distinctive expressions of our students. I recall orchestrating a brainstorming session where students, including Ravi, fervently etched their ideas on a whiteboard. The room was electrified with energy, ideas ricocheting off the walls, akin to an intense game of ping-pong. These sessions, mirroring a sanctuary, afforded the students the space to concentrate, reflect, and shape their narratives. These gatherings served as a crucible, refining their thoughts and ideas, and sculpting them into captivating essays.

4. Writing for the Global Audience

While our students are firmly rooted in the Indian academic landscape, their essays are often destined for international shores, particularly the USA and UK. Colleges in these countries seek a unique point of view, an authentic voice, and a genuine story. Our students, with their distinctive blend of experiences and perspectives, bring a richness to their essays that's borne out of their unique cultural and academic journey. Colleges in these countries seek a unique point of view, an authentic voice, and a genuine story. I recall a session with Ravi where we discussed his dream universities in the USA and UK. We talked about how these institutions sought not just academic excellence but also authenticity and a unique point of view. Ravi, with his unique blend of Indian and international experiences, brought a distinctive flavor to his essay. His story was not just about his academic prowess, but also about his cultural heritage, his challenges, and his dreams- a truly global narrative.

5. Lessons from the Journey (Ahead)

The journey of writing an essay is like a trek through the Himalayas. With every step, students gain a better understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations. Ravi, for instance, discovered his passion for environmental science while crafting his essay. His final draft was not just a personal statement but a reflection of his journey, his resilience, and his aspirations. The challenges students face while writing essays are akin to climbing a mountain. With every step, they gain a better understanding of who they are and what they aspire to be. As they navigate the uphill task of writing an essay, they not only conquer their academic and cultural hurdles but also discover their unique voice.

In the end, it's not just about writing an essay. It's about their resilience, their journey of self-discovery,, and most importantly, their unique Indian spirit. As counselors, we're privileged to be a part of this journey and how challenges, when viewed through the right lens, can become stepping stones to success, witnessing firsthand the transformation of these young minds, one essay at a time.

7 WAYS IN WHICH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM ATTENDING SBC CAMPS

Exploring New Horizons
By
Will Finlayson
Director
Summer Boarding School



Will Finlayson

By attending the UK's no.1 multi-campus summer school, international students can experience profound benefits with the next steps in their academic journey. Through experiencing some of the UK's most prestigious campuses located in historic and celebrated academic cities such as Oxford, Cambridge, and Windsor, students have a unique chance to experience a summer learning adventure with an extraordinary impact.

Let's explore the incredible benefits that being part of Summer Boarding Courses can bring.

Becoming a Global Citizen

With an alumni of over 15,000 students from more than 150 countries, you will broaden your cultural horizons, learning from classmates with different world views. For so many of our students, this is the favourite part of their summer school adventure and a chance to make new friends from all over the world.

Global citizenship is important because it gives students a greater awareness and understanding of the wider world and their impact in it.

Complete English Language immersion

Through belonging to an international community you can maximise the amount of English you get to experience and use. Ensuring total immersion. If you are looking for the chance to boost your confidence, increase your fluency, and expand your word power - then by attending a summer school you can only better your all-round performance in English.

University Preparation

So many of our students have had a transformational experience during their stay, creating profound momentum and a clear sense of direction with what they want to study at university. By combining professional experiences with learning styles such as seminars, tutorials and guest lectures, a style purposely designed to mirror university, you'll feel more prepared for higher education than ever before.

Gain Boarding Experience

Whether you are preparing to go to university or even about to experience campus life at a boarding school for the first time. Summer school is a wonderful introduction to the boarding experience. By sharing campus facilities, taking part in a fantastic range of activities, and enjoying communal dining...summer school is the perfect place to develop independence and feel ready for boarding away from home.

Experiencing Future-Focused Academic Subjects

With a whole range of academic courses, students have the opportunity to study brand-new subjects like medicine and law, that they might not be able to access at school. They'll gain first-hand insight into what studying their chosen subject is like in further education, empowering them to make informed decisions with their future studies and even their choice of career.

"My experience here has helped me a lot with my academic progress, firstly because medicine is not something I can study in high school and it is what I want to pursue at University and I was able to have an overview of what I want to do in life. I got a deeper knowledge of specific subjects like biology and chemistry. We also had lectures from professors and other med students that helped me understand how my life could be in a year's time."

-MIRIDA, STUDENT, OXFORD COLLEGE

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During every lesson at summer school, you have a chance to develop so many essential skills. Everything about Summer Boarding Courses in the classroom, is hands-on, allowing you to gain valuable experience in developing key 21st-century skills, such as: communication, problem-solving, and collaboration. By developing these vital skills, you will be able to put your theoretical knowledge into practice, building an essential in-demand skill-set that supports future education and careers.

Fantastic Personal Growth

For many students, this is an opportunity to step outside of your comfort zone. You'll become a part of a growing community that supports, challenges and nurtures you through a variety of brand-new learning experiences, engaging activities and excursions that will take you to places such as London and Oxford. You'll have an authentic experience of studying in the UK and leave with a passion for learning and a newfound sense of confidence and independence.



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