

## ■ DOS AND DON'TS

# How to plan further studies

For many high school students, the time to begin shortlisting universities for further studies is fast approaching. How do you choose a university? More importantly, how can you improve your chances of being selected by the university of your choice? Sanjeev Verma, director of Intelligent Partners, shares some dos and don'ts on university applications:

*When should you start thinking about where you want to go to college?*

You can never be too early but you can easily be too late. Teenagers and parents should start focusing on university admissions before the student starts high school. It is very important to realise that top universities will not only consider academic results but your extra-curricular activities as well.

*What do universities look for in an application?*

An exemplary academic record is a good start. Tier one universities are not just interested in attracting the world's brightest kids; they want to educate the world's future leaders. This means that the selection process asks referees to comment on where the student stands in comparison not just to the rest of his or her school, but in relation to any student the referee has ever taught. They also look for evidence of leadership qualities.

Extra-curricular activities such as community service and sports are also areas which come to the fore in decision-making.

*How can you choose a university that best suits you?*

University selection should not be based merely on the 'brand'. Your choice of university should be based on your interests and personality type. It is important to focus on the strengths of the faculty for the subject you wish to study.

Geographical location, setting, size, type of institution, faculty and costs are factors you need to take into consideration.

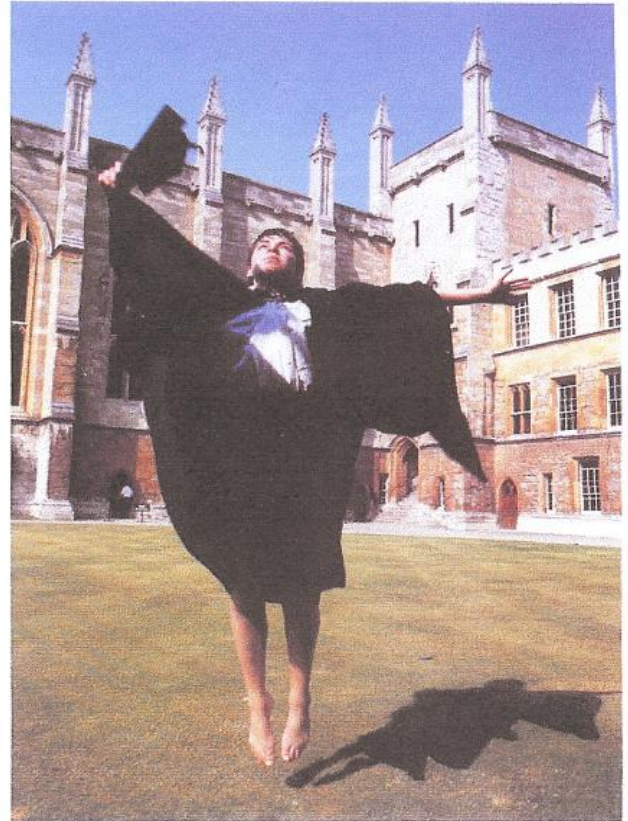
Select a university where people will encourage your intellectual journey.

*Why should I visit the campus before accepting an offer?*

A university tour allows you to experience the campus' personality. You will also get to see the facilities, accommodation and neighbourhood firsthand and thus form an educated opinion about whether that university is the right institution for you.

## Steps to making the right decision

- Think about possible careers and consider shadowing professionals in the fields in which you are interested in or try to secure an internship.
- Plan your summer holidays and think about what you can do to expand your horizons. Read a book, climb a mountain, explore another culture, or experience the satisfaction of helping others. Colleges are watching to see what you do when you don't have to do anything.
- Reading gives you a well-rounded background. College admissions pick up on that during interviews.
- Select challenging coursework and strive for the highest possible grades during high school, particularly in your final year.
- Become involved in activities that you are passionate about. Keep a record of your community service, cultural and sporting activities.
- A personal statement should be simple and honest and should not be verbose or 'flowery'. Always proofread your essays to ensure there are no spelling mistakes or grammatical errors.
- For your recommendation letters, identify the teachers who know you best (depending on how many recommendation letters you need). They must be able to specifically discuss your core strengths and abilities. Give your teachers plenty of time.
- Do not begin your application process without a checklist or timeline.



- Being focused is the key to success in the admission process. Think about the issues that you are passionate about and of which you're most proud. Think about what makes you different from others. Include that in your application. Find a way to set yourself apart.
- Describe how you can make a contribution to the schools to which you apply.
- Prepare for the interview. Read about current events and attend mock interview sessions.
- The institutions you apply to should be well spread in terms of level – some ambitious, some regular and some safety nets. ■

– As told to Ruqya Khan,  
a Sharjah-based freelance writer

Intelligent Partners and British education group ISIS will conduct a three-day workshop in April to provide answers to students who wish to apply to universities in the UK and the US.  
For more info: [www.intelligentgulf.com](http://www.intelligentgulf.com)