

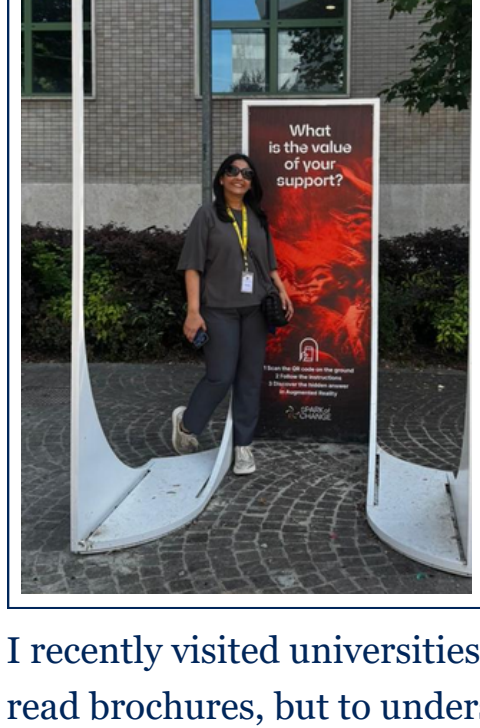


ON POINT INSIGHTS

Navigating higher ed



From the Counselor's Desk...



For years, when families started exploring study abroad options, the conversation centered around the US and UK with Canada and Australia being a compromise destination. But since last year, that conversation has taken on a new twist. More students and families are now looking beyond the obvious choices, particularly toward Europe and Asia. A lot of this is driven by practical considerations: cost, post-study opportunities, and changing visa and immigration environments across traditional destinations. But part of it is also a mindset shift as families begin to look beyond brand names to ask themselves where are the best opportunities?

I recently visited universities across Italy, Spain, and France — not to review rankings or read brochures, but to understand what studying there might actually feel like. What does the campus energy say? What is the city like at 3 in the afternoon on a Tuesday? How much structure is provided, and how much independence is expected? The teaching style, the level of student independence, and the ease with which a young person can build community often matter as much as the academic program itself. What I observed was a stimulating and rigorous learning environment, but one that may not work for every student. My takeaway was that Europe is a fantastic option for students who are independent, self-directed, comfortable in multicultural spaces, and open to academic and social systems that may differ from what they have known. Students who can navigate ambiguity, take ownership of their time, and see the unfamiliar as an invitation rather than a barrier would thrive in this environment. So as families explore options beyond the Big Four, the question should not be, “Is Europe better?” but, “Is this the kind of environment in which my child will thrive?” For the right student, looking beyond the obvious four may not be a compromise. It may be the better fit.

Raise the Bar

While Math is a part of our daily life whether figuring out each person's share after a group trip, deciding which subscription gives better value, or noticing when a "50% off" offer is not actually translating into savings. Math is often seen as a subject to be studied, scored, and survived. The real value, however, lies in teaching how to reason, break down complex problems, identify patterns, and make sense of information when the answer is not obvious. That is why olympiads and math competitions can be powerful tools in a student's profile-building journey. Not for the medal but for the process: learning to test more than one approach when sitting with a difficult problem and understanding how one gets to the right answer. The strongest profiles are built when students carry that mindset into areas that reflect their real academic interests. Consider a student with a strong record in math competitions who had no intention of studying mathematics in college. Instead, he applied that foundation across disciplines — applying statistical tools to economics research, modeling equity market behavior using Python, and managing large-scale event budgets. What stood out was not that he was “good at math,” but that he had learned how to think with precision, structure, and persistence. That is the real case for building quantitative skills early and seriously because mathematical thinking strengthens almost every academic path that follows.

College Spotlight:



There is a particular kind of student who leaves high school already thinking about careers, employability, and networking, and is not especially interested in spending the first year figuring things out. Both **Bocconi University** in Milan and **IE University** in Madrid are built almost entirely around that student. On the surface, the two share obvious similarities: English-taught programs, highly international classrooms, strong placement into finance and consulting, and a campus culture that treats career readiness as seriously as academics. Bocconi leans more toward economics and quantitative rigor, while IE sits closer to the business and entrepreneurship side of things. But spending time at each campus makes the differences just as visible as the commonalities. Bocconi offers no room to drift. The curriculum locks you into your program from day one, there are no double majors or late-stage pivots. Admissions decisions are made on hard data: 55% weightage goes to a standardized test, either the SAT, ACT, or Bocconi's own online test, and the remaining 45% to grades from the third-last and second-last year of school. No recommendation letters, no extracurriculars, no motivational essays. The workload in Year 1 is a significant step up, and mathematics is where most students feel it first. The associations, meanwhile, function more like early career environments. Milan itself adds another dimension — the city functions as an extension of the classroom. IE operates out of a striking 35-floor tower in Madrid with a second location in Segovia. Some programs are split across both. Students on the Segovia campus often describe it as a more traditional campus experience compared to the urban intensity of the Tower. With over 160 nationalities represented, a good portion of what students learn comes from the people around them, not just the syllabus. Labs and structured projects allow first and second-year students to work with real companies before they are eligible for formal internships. One of the standout offerings is the Global Bachelor in Business Administration, a 4-year English-taught program across Madrid, Dubai, and Singapore, with an optional pathway allowing students to complete their bachelor's in three years followed by a specialized master's year at IE New York College. What both schools make clear is that neither is a place to arrive undecided. The students who do well here show up with a sense of direction, a tolerance for pressure, and an understanding that the work starts well before graduation.

What's Happening In Higher Ed?

Majors, Programs, and Academic Updates

Demand for future-proofing programs is rising fast among college going students, as employability becomes the primary driver of course selection, and the IB is responding with a **new Systems Transformation Pathway** as part of the IBDB by 2030. **New research** highlights how funding pressures and research competitiveness are straining

higher education systems globally, with **half of universities worldwide now reporting enrollment declines** and institutions being urged to rethink recruitment and diversify their student base. Concerns around academic preparedness are also resurfacing, with University of California professors calling for the **return of SAT requirements**, citing significant gaps in students' mathematical readiness.

Beyond the Big Four

Indian student demand remains strong,

with interest increasingly shifting toward emerging destinations, even as India explores a **centralized database for outbound students** to better coordinate support during global crises. Germany is also seeing growing interest, particularly from students in **India's tier-II and III cities**, driven by affordability, employability, and migration pathways.



Spain is a clear beneficiary, now welcoming **nearly 160,000 international students** annually, while South Korea's appeal is also growing, though a new report finds **most international students there are concentrated in low-paid service jobs**, raising questions about real-world outcomes.

The Big Four

Policy recalibration is underway across all four markets. The **US may cap F-1 student stays at four years**, ending the open-ended duration of the status system, and separately, **US immigration is investigating thousands of students** over alleged fake OPT employment claims. In the UK, debate is growing around **removing Oxbridge colleges from the admissions process** to improve fairness and access. While in Canada, **Ontario is estimated to lose over a third of its international students** following the study permit cap. Australia, too, is tightening its open door policy, with **nearly half of South Asian applicants now being refused study visas**, reinforcing an increasingly restrictive outlook across the board.

Testimonial

“I really liked how personalized the support was. Over two years, Rachna ma’am got to know a lot about me and was really able to understand how I work. She directed, helped, and edited all my essays ensured that they were personal, showed growth, and also conveyed my voice and who I am as a person. While writing college essays was not one of my greatest strengths, her support really helped make the process smoother. Having frequent meetings really supported me as well through the stressful application process. I am also really grateful that she pushed me to ED to Dartmouth, showing her stability, guidance, and support during the college admissions process. I also think that On Point helped a lot with profile building. Over around a year, I was able to do much more than I could have ever imagined through extracurriculars and super curricular explorations without having too much on my plate at any point in time.”

Dheera Mehndiratta

Dartmouth College

Class of 2030

