



From the Counselor’s Desk...



There is a point in the application season when comparison begins to make even the strongest of profiles feel incomplete. As deadlines get closer, students often start to wonder if something is missing and whether they should have done something more.

A perfect IB score. A 1550+ SAT. School leadership. Global math olympiad distinctions. Mentored research project. National chess ranking.

On paper, there is more than enough to work with. Yet the focus is not on one’s own achievement but what someone else has done. A more selective program. A bigger award. A project that sounds more impressive. And soon, the question becomes: what else should I do?

This is the thing about applying to selective institutions: even high-achieving students begin to feel they have fallen behind because the finish line keeps shifting. Of course, as a counselor, I push my students to stretch themselves. But another activity does not always make the application stronger. Sometimes the better approach is not adding more but understanding the value of the experience – the learning, the challenges, the ways in which one’s thinking changed, the new ideas that took shape.

These reflections when shared in an essay often do more for an application than one more activity added last minute. They help a student understand what has shaped them, what they care about, and where their effort has actually led.

At some point, the idea is not to add another line to the list. It is to make sense of the ones already there.

Raise the Bar

Summer school done. Volunteer hours logged. Competitions taken on.

Summer has come to an end, and it was a busy time for most high school students. This list is only the tip of the iceberg for most. But now that all this has been done, what separates a strong profile from a busy one is not the number of activities but how a student builds on them.

I am thinking of a student who participated in a **data science program** at Plaksha, an entrepreneurship camp with LSE-ISBF, a course on Financial Modeling with **Futurowise**, submitted an essay for the LSE Economics Competition, and built an outreach project with **Tribes for Good** using Bollywood movies to teach financial literacy.

What else would the universities want to see in his application?

They would be interested in knowing how he applied the learnings from the data science program and entrepreneurship camp. Did the economics competition change how he thinks about market behaviour? What did he do to expand outreach and generate impact with the financial literacy project?

Admissions officers are looking for candidates who demonstrate depth by continuing to build on an activity, even in a small way. Such applicants become more compelling than those who simply tick the box and move on to the next item.

So, remember, the summer activities don't have to become just another line on the résumé; they should become the foundation for what comes next.



Spotlight:
Sciences Po | École Polytechnique

Sciences Po and **École Polytechnique** both represent two very different approaches to the French undergraduate education experience. Sciences Po offers the breadth and interdisciplinary approach associated with a liberal arts education, while École Polytechnique is firmly rooted in STEM. Both are highly selective, internationally oriented institutions, but the paths they prepare students for are different.

Sciences Po is built around the social sciences, with an emphasis on politics, economics, law, history, and sociology. Students begin with a common interdisciplinary foundation before choosing two majors in their second year, followed by a third year abroad at one of the 445 partner universities. A 140-hour civic internship and a capstone project are graduation requirements. The undergraduate degree is strongly geared towards further study, with 97% of graduates continuing to master’s programs.

At École Polytechnique, students complete their core requirements with STEM, Humanities, and Social Science courses. In the second year, they move into a compulsory double major, combining Mathematics with either Physics, Computer Science, or Economics. The academic pace is extremely demanding, with a strong emphasis on mathematical reasoning. In the final year, students complete an eight-week research internship as part of their mandatory bachelor thesis. 90% of graduates pursue further studies, with 36% specializing in data science, mathematics, or physics and 27% in management, business, finance, or economics.

The students who thrive at these universities tend to have something in common: they are academically curious, comfortable with demanding coursework, and willing to engage deeply with what they are learning. Whether through civic work and international mobility at Sciences Po or research and scientific innovation at École Polytechnique, both environments reward students who are genuinely engaged and ready to push themselves.

What’s Happening In Higher Ed?



The Big 4

The traditional study destinations are becoming more selective and more cautious about international enrolment. In the US, **student visa numbers for Indian and Chinese nationals are falling sharply**, while a proposed **\$100,000 fee for international graduates seeking to work in the US** could further affect post-study plans.

The impact is already being felt at the institutional level, with US universities facing an **estimated \$3.4 billion hit as international enrolments decline**. The UK is seeing **another decline in student visas ahead of a crucial recruitment period**, while universities are **exploring new pathways** for students affected by visa restrictions. Australia is making the application process more streamlined through **DigiLocker-based document verification**.

Beyond the Big 4

Indian students are becoming increasingly outcome-focused when considering international education. Recent protests over examinations in India led to the **education minister’s resignation**. Four in five Indian study abroad aspirants now **plan to return home after graduation**. The number of Indians going abroad has also **fallen 31% over two years**. Meanwhile, India continues to strengthen as an education destination, with **students from 173 countries now studying in the country**. **Irish universities are rethinking recruitment strategies** as students place greater weight on employability and long-term value. Germany continues to build **student engagement** through initiatives such as the **DAAD Young Ambassador Program**, with applications currently open until September 30, 2026. **Japan and Russia** are also resuming youth exchanges.

Testimonial

“Thank you for your constant guidance and encouragement throughout the last two years. Be it celebrating at 5 am for ED or a four-hour meeting on New Year's morning to finish essays, you've always been that support we could rely on whenever we needed.”

Ishaan & Vivaan Poddar

