WHAT TO EXPECT

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS OVERVIEW

The American university admissions season runs (generally) from August 1 through early January of the 12th grade. Students file applications electronically, often to several colleges in one form (one of the most used is the Common Application). High schools complete and upload school reports (including transcripts and teacher recommendation letters). Families prompt test services to send SAT, ACT and Subject Test scores.

The applications are not complicated – they are designed for use by 17-year olds – but strategy is important. To be effective in their admissions effort, students must understand how their prospective colleges are evaluating them. Some colleges focus on test scores, while others use a holistic process that evaluates (1) academic performance and potential, (2) depth and breadth of non-academic activities, and (3) the applicant's human characteristics.

Most applications use a main essay: a personal statement (the California public universities, at present, use four smaller essays). In addition to the main personal statement, America's best colleges request "supplemental" essays. Students applying to the most selective universities usually write 15-20 essays or more (some colleges demand 4 or 5 additional essays each). UCA clients are trained how to write each type of essay (tutorials and How-To guides) and are repeatedly prompted for adequate content. We don't just edit.

Many top universities use admissions interviews as part of their review process. UCA provides top-quality interview preparation, including a tutorial; question-and-answer practice session to identify the student's natural voice; a mock interview; debriefing and final tune-up.

UCA uses a team approach. Each student works one-on-one with a Client Manager, but there are other professionals working with students as well. During our Guided Self-Analysis module, students preferably work with at least two UCA professionals so that each student becomes comfortable with different adults and so UCA can brainstorm strategies and avoid bias. During essay-writing, students will receive multiple edits from multiple editors. Each edit has a different purpose, and different editors ensure more broad-based evaluation and fresh eyes for every edit. During interview preparation, to give students the most realistic experience, the mock interviewer will be with one of our professionals unknown to the student.

Everything UCA does is designed for the highest-quality result. Our program utilizes the CAM Protocol, a system designed by UCA to guarantee consistent results.

What should clients expect while working with UCA?

First, you should expect personal service. Although our meetings are conducted over the internet

(usually Skype), our work is one-on-one and focused. Our program is well-defined, but we strongly encourage students and families to email us whenever questions arise. In addition to meetings, UCA typically exchanges several hundred emails with each student during the admissions season. You should expect prompt, detailed and professional response from UCA, and you should also know that UCA will send you information not only about what has happened with your student, but about what to expect in the coming months. We want your questions answered even before you have realized that you have questions.

Second, we pride ourselves on the best quality work in the world, but the more the student focuses on the efforts, the better the results.

If you start with UCA in the 10th grade, we are able to give guidance about building your resume of activities following the geographic preferences that highly-selective colleges prefer. We will also provide guidance about SAT/ACT testing, including test selection, timing, and recommended test tutors, as well as support for course selection and performance issues.

During 11th grade, starting in January, student are evaluated through our proprietary Guided Self-Analysis sessions. In three GSA meetings, we help students evaluate their natural personality and learning strengths, using exercises that UCA created, including a memory inventory, preference inventory, environmental inventory, and a personalized 20-class college curriculum, designed by the student and analyzed by UCA so that students learn how to make educational decisions and identify colleges that provide the curricular structures in which they will flourish.

Parents are part of the process, too. UCA asks parents to complete a questionnaire describing their students' personal and interpersonal qualities.

After the GSA sessions, students have a separate meeting to discuss their academic and environmental college preferences. From this meeting, students and UCA jointly develop a beginning college list: UCA suggests schools that might "fit" the student's needs, and students are given a 5-part Researching Schools exercise to teach them how to research colleges and find the appropriate fit. UCA provides a spreadsheet with pre-created columns that prompt students to examine important attributes of prospective colleges and allows them to sort and add to the list, which will be adjusted and improved throughout application season. UCA recommends a blended list of colleges, from reach/stretch schools to mid-grade "fit" schools to safety schools. Our goal is to achieve options for April of 12th Grade, which is when most students select their universities.

At the end of the GSA meetings, UCA will have helped each student create a Personal Thesis, a personal/interpersonal attribute that adds value on top of grades, test scores, and resume items.

The Personal Thesis serves as the marketing foundation for the college applications.

With the Personal Thesis as the guide, students start work on their main Personal Statement. UCA provides specific instructions plus over 10 sample essays to help students understand the assigned tasks. Students first provide 4-6 "vignettes," small moments that illustrate the Personal Thesis. Then, UCA helps students structure their essays utilizing the psychological and memory principles such as the Serial Position Effect. Students create an outline according to UCA protocol, which is edited by UCA and then adjusted and supplemented by each student. Then students write a Speed Draft based precisely on the outline, providing the natural voice and flow that makes an essay compelling. UCA performs a Content Edit, after which students perform their own Student Edit using Editing Guidelines provided by UCA. We edit the essay again, focusing on grammar, punctuation and style, helping polish the essay into a fine finished product and returning to the Speed Draft to ensure each student's individual voice.

During the GSA process, UCA students are asked to complete an Idea Generator, a six-page document of questions prompting students to think about important issues in their development. These answers form the basis of student supplemental essays, which are drafted after completion of the main Personal Statement.

Students are given instruction, protocol sheets, worksheets, and examples of the four "standard" types of supplemental essays. Then UCA helps students group their colleges' essay prompts and begin work on the supplemental essays in an ordered, efficient manner. The supplements are written in a different manner (by virtue of their different purposes), and in most cases, student drafting and UCA editing is more efficient. However, when student work is below par, UCA will return the work for complete rewriting. We demand top-quality content.

As the application season approaches, UCA will provide strategy about early-admission and application timing. We provide preferred filing dates and deadlines for each application and oversee student progress to ensure strategic completion. We also oversee student interview efforts, which require attention to college interview request deadlines.

Early admissions results usually arrive during the second week of December, and UCA provides strategies for those whose application has been deferred. After the regular decision filing deadlines (usually around January 1), UCA provides strategies for updating student applications and getting the attention of college admission representatives. Regular decision results are released from early March through April 1, and UCA provides strategies for waiting list candidates. During April, UCA helps students and families decide between their offers to select the best education value.

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This is an overview of what to expect, but obviously there is more going on in the process. Much of what we do is behind the scenes, and each student and family is treated individually. UCA will provide instruction every step of the way. You do not need to lead the efforts, nor should you; this is a confusing process that changes not only yearly, but even monthly. All we ask is to keep an open mind, participate, and pay attention. Let UCA's expertise and experience guide you to the best possible results.