

Starting Your Journey

As you plan for your child to enter a university or go to a boarding school it is never too early to start thinking about your journey. There are many schools, colleges and universities in the US and it is important to begin by answering a few questions very honestly to help guide you and your child as you put together a list of schools.

1. What are my child's areas of interests and academic strengths?
2. What will be the academic challenges for my child?
3. Does my child perform well on tests like the SAT, TOEFL, IELTS?
4. What type of student is my child? For example, is your child always in the top 10% of the class, more toward the middle, or constantly struggling to achieve?
5. What type of weather does my child like most?
6. What type of environment is best for my child? (big city, small city, large town, small town, country)
7. What size school would be best for my child?
8. What does my child want to do for a career?
9. Is my child comfortable traveling alone? Does the school need to be close to an airport with easy flights to home?
10. What does my child need to be happy?
11. What is my child's biggest fear about going abroad to school?
12. What is my biggest fear as the parent about my child going abroad to school?

It might be fun for both parents and the child to answer these questions separately and then openly share the answers and try to come to an agreement so that you are all searching for the same thing. Attending a university or a boarding school abroad is a huge investment of money in your child's education. To begin to focus your search, you need to establish parameters that you all understand and agree upon.

Many parents will tell me that they don't care where their child goes as long as the school is ranked well. Be careful with rankings. If the rankings are important to you, then you need to decide if you are going to use the rankings in general of the university, or if you are going to use the rankings of the actual major. For example, if your child is looking to pursue a major of Computer Science, several of the universities ranked in the top twenty-five for this particular undergraduate program, are not ranked in the top 50 for universities in general. Which is more important to you, the university itself or the program of study?

Do not underestimate the importance of your child's happiness. I have seen many children become very depressed and have to leave their boarding school or university because the school was not a good fit and they were very, very, unhappy. When I work with families, the fit between the answers to the above questions and the school is by far the most important filter to use as you begin a search.

Visiting school and university campuses is also very important. First hand knowledge of the school is valuable, even if that particular school does not end up on your child's list. When a child can verbalize what he or she liked at a school, it makes it much easier to put together a comprehensive and well-developed list of choices. At this point in the process, children usually are working with a list of about 15-20 universities, or 8-10 boarding schools. The next steps are to strategically adjust the list as you gain more information throughout the spring and summer. By starting your journey with an agreed upon plan, the map forward will be much clearer and the process much easier!

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