



# College Counseling Handbook

For students (and their parents)

## **A Note to Students and their Parents**

The college application process should involve close communication between the student, parents, and college counselors. Families should have conversations about picking and applying to universities. Students, as well as their parents, should meet with the college counselors and take advantage of the resources available through the College Counseling Office.

College applications are primarily the student's responsibility. Students should be proactive, organized, and self-motivated to make it through this challenging process. Students need to start planning for college at the beginning of secondary school, keep track of deadlines, and check email daily.

Lebanon has good local universities (LAU, USJ, AUB, NDU, etc.) with rather straightforward applications, but an increasing number of students are considering other options, mainly to the USA, Canada, and the UK. These applications are more complicated and very different from one another.

The college process presents an opportunity for personal growth, self-reflection, and self-discovery. We seek to provide students with the tools they will need to navigate the different pathways to college admission. An important part of this process is finding schools that match each student's preferences and needs.

This handbook contains information mainly on English-language universities in Lebanon and abroad. Check the Moodle page for more resources and IC deadlines. The college counselors are here to guide and answer questions. Get in touch for more information or to schedule a meeting.

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**This handbook should help you answer the following questions:**

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## How do I pick which universities to apply to?

Remember, there are *no perfect universities*, and the best match for you may not be the most famous school.

You can start by answering the following questions to make sure the universities you are applying to will be a good fit for you.

### Location

- Do I like living in cities, small towns, the countryside?
- Do I want to be close to my family?
- Does my family want me to be close to them?
- Does weather matter to me?

### Size

- Do I want small classes and a more personal relationship with professors?
- Would I prefer the choices and options of a bigger university?
- Do I want to recognize everyone on campus?
- Would I prefer lots of opportunities to meet new people?

### Academic programs

- Does the university offer the major or program I want to study?
- Does the university have choices of classes that interest me?
- Do I want a very focused program like universities in the UK offer, or the freedom of an American-style liberal arts education?

### Special programs

- Do I want to study abroad?
- Is there an honors program I could apply for?
- Does the university have an international student orientation?

### Clubs and activities

- What do I like to do outside of class?
- Does the university have sports teams I can join?
- Are there clubs that interest me?
- How easy is it to get involved in activities?

### Housing

- Do students live on campus the first year? All four years?
- Am I okay sharing a room?
- Can I clean and cook for myself?
- Do I want to find my own housing?
- Do I want a university where everyone eats in the dining hall?

**Facilities**

- Does the university have good labs?
- Is it important to me that there is a nice gym?
- Are there theaters?
- What are the classrooms and dorm rooms like?

**Cost**

- Is my family planning on paying full tuition?
- Does the school offer merit scholarships?
- Would I be eligible for financial aid?

**Length of Program**

How many years will it take me to finish my program?

Usual Number of Years for a Bachelor's Degree							
Institution/Country	Lebanese Diploma	Bac	French Diploma	Bac	International Diploma	Bac	IC Diploma
AUB/LAU	3		3		3		4
USA	4		4*		4*		4
UK	4		3		3		4
Canada	4		3-4		3-4		4

\*Many schools in the US will give credit for passing baccalaureate exams or use them for placement purposes  
Some degrees take longer to complete, for example, engineering, architecture, graphic design, etc.

## How many universities should I apply to?

Keep your list of universities **focused** and **balanced**. You should apply only to universities you would be happy to attend and match your answers to the questions in the previous section. Make sure your list has schools with different levels of selectivity.

As a general rule, apply to:

- 2 schools if you are applying locally
- 5 schools in the UK (this is the number allowed through the UCAS application)
- 3-10 schools in the USA or Canada

Once you have a list of colleges you think you will be satisfied attending, sort it into three categories:

**Safeties:** These are colleges that you feel you have a very good chance of getting into and that you think you can afford to attend. They should also be colleges you would be happy to attend.

**Good matches:** These are colleges that you feel you have a good chance of getting into and that are good matches for you overall.

**Reaches:** These are colleges that you think may be more of a challenge to get into. Getting in is not a sure thing, but it's realistic enough to be worth the effort of applying.

**Balance Your List:** From your sorted list, you should choose:

- One to two safeties
- Two to four good matches
- One to two reaches

You must complete each section of an application carefully, since admission officers can tell if you're not serious about their school. In fact, they look for students who are enthusiastic about their school. If you have successfully identified one good safety school on your list, you should feel confident that you will receive at least one acceptance letter.

## **What will impact my chances of getting accepted?**

Universities want to accept students who are academically strong and can also contribute to the college community. Each of the following categories will impact your chance of getting admitted, though universities place different weight on each of these categories.

### **Grades**

Every university wants to see your transcript. Your grades should be strong across the board, especially if you want to be admitted to a selective university. Universities may take your grades in the subjects related to your potential major or course of study especially into consideration. If you apply to universities abroad, your transcript will also include your grades from 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **Test Scores**

AUB and LAU require SAT scores with your application. Most universities in the US require either the SAT or the ACT, and may also require SAT subject tests. Universities in the UK do not require the SAT, but do require predicted grades. Universities in Canada require predicted grades if you are an IB or French Bac student, and otherwise encourage the submission of SAT scores.

Universities may have cut-offs for test scores, but more often, they have a range. This range is usually set by the applicant pool, and may vary year-to-year. If you are applying to universities in the US and you are in the lower end of the range, you can sometimes make up for this by being strong in other aspects of your application, for example in your essay. Some schools in the US make submitting test scores optional.

You should always check the specific requirements of the universities you are applying to, since they may require different exams, language proficiency tests, and may have different deadlines.

### **Involvement beyond the Classroom**

If you are applying to universities in the UK or applying into sophomore year at a Lebanese university, your academic record and school performance is the most important component of your application. Universities in the US, however, place high value on your involvement in activities outside of the classroom, and want to see evidence that you are involved in your community and passionate about your activities. Canadian schools fall somewhere in between universities in the US and the UK when considering your non-academic experiences.

All students are recommended to be involved in volunteer work, sports, music, or other co-curricular activities, because the confidence, skills, and social awareness you build through these activities will benefit you in the future.

### **Essays**

Essays are a very important part of an application to a US university. The essay is your chance to distinguish yourself from other applicants, to explain formative experiences in your life, how you think, what you are passionate about, or any weak points in your academic record.

The personal statement for UK applications is a little different. Universities in the UK are more interested in your academic strengths, and why you would succeed in your chosen course of study. UK universities are not interested in your personal experiences unless they relate to your academics.

Lebanese universities may ask you for additional information, especially if you are applying for Freshman year. The requirements for Canadian universities vary.

Visit the Moodle page for more specific information on how to write a strong essay/personal statement. Always check the specific requirements for your universities.

### **Letters of Recommendation**

Letters of recommendation can help give a more holistic portrait of you and add strength to your applications. Letters should come from teachers who know you well and can speak in detail to your academic and personal strengths.

Most US universities request letters of recommendation. The standard number is two, though some schools may allow more or require one or none. Canadian universities generally do not review letters of recommendation.

Universities in the UK accept one letter, called a reference letter. This letter is generally written by Ms. Assir, though you are encouraged to ask 1-2 teachers to write a paragraph about your performance in class and submit it to Ms. Assir. She will include information from these paragraphs to strengthen her letter.

Check Moodle for due dates and forms relating to letters of recommendation.

### **Disciplinary Record**

The college counseling office is required to report your disciplinary record to the universities you apply to. Any changes in your disciplinary record after you applications are submitted will also be reported. It is important that you maintain a clean disciplinary record.

## What tests do I need to take?

The requirements will vary for students from the different programs and for universities in different countries. You will have to consult with your college counselor to verify which exams you will need to take for the various universities to which you are applying. These are some of the most common ones, but this list is not exhaustive:

- **SAT** (required by most US colleges, Lebanese universities, some Canadian, no UK)
- **SAT Subject tests** (required by some US colleges only)
- **TOEFL** (language proficiency test most commonly used in USA)
- **IELTS** (language proficiency test most commonly used in UK)
- **LNAT** (for studying law in the UK)
- **BMAT** (for studying medicine in the UK)
- **ACT** (an alternative to the SAT for US colleges)
- Some colleges have their own entrance tests.

You are responsible for registering for the tests. This is done and submitted online. Remember to request that your scores be sent to the universities to which you are applying. For American institutions, you will be asked for the school code, or the CEEB code. For IC, the SAT code is 685300.

The calendar of SAT tests is posted on the College Board website and on the door of the College Counseling Office.

If you have any kind of learning condition that requires extra testing time for the SAT, your parents must submit a request through the College Counseling Office and produce extensive medical evidence that proves you should be given extra time. It takes 7-8 weeks for College Board to reach a decision after all documentation has been submitted.

Each college has different testing requirements. Carefully check which tests are required and the latest test date they will accept. Allow 3-4 weeks after your test date for colleges to receive your scores.

*Study Tip:* Download the Smartphone App “SAT Question of the Day.”

## How do I stay on top of everything?

*It's normal to feel overwhelmed, but remember you have resources to help you!*

### General Advice:

- Start having conversations with your family early in high school about where you might want to study.
- Meet with your college counselors; they are here to help you understand the process and find schools and programs that fit you.
- For seniors, download the college checklist from Moodle to keep on top of deadlines. Stay organized to avoid the stress of missing due dates or having things pile up last minute.

### What to think about each year:

#### Grade 10

- Check your IC email daily. This is how your teachers, the College Counseling Office, and the administration communicate with you.
- Study hard and be aware of your grades. You have to put in effort to get results.
- Work to keep your disciplinary record clean; universities are given this information
- Find ways to get involved beyond the classroom. Cultivate your interests: find volunteer work you are passionate about, stay involved in sports teams, participate in music groups, take extra art classes, or whatever else gets you excited.
- Familiarize yourself with Naviance
- Create a testing strategy
- Consider meeting with a college counselor

#### Grade 11

- Continue to work hard in your classes and keep a clean disciplinary record
- Stay involved in your activities; you want to demonstrate dedication and passion
- Meet with your college counselor
- Take the SAT and any other exams you may need
- Make a preliminary college list
- Consider which teachers you might ask for letters of recommendation
- Over the summer, begin you applications and write drafts of essays

#### Grade 12

- Meet with your college counselor
- Attend workshops for completing applications abroad
- Confirm your letters of recommendation with teachers (forms and deadlines are on Moodle)
- Submit a Transcript Release Form for each university you are applying to abroad (deadlines and forms are available on Moodle)
- Complete each of your applications by the deadline
- Fill out financial aid information or proof of finances

- Keep working in class and keeping your disciplinary record clean. Even after your applications are submitted, or even after you have received an acceptance, changes in your grades and/or disciplinary status will be reported to colleges and could result in a denial or withdrawal of acceptance.

# American University of Beirut

## Applicants to AUB (Sophomore Year)

A Baccalaureate (French, Lebanese, or IB) is a prerequisite for starting as a Sophomore at AUB

You should submit your application to Ms. Soubaih in the College Counseling Office by the IC deadline. If you miss this deadline, you will be responsible for submitting your own application directly to AUB.

### You must submit:

1. A completed application form
2. One photo glued on to page 1
3. A photocopy of your passport/ID (if there is more than one, include both)
4. The **exact** amount of USD 80 or LL 120,000.
5. Your SAT scores as printed out from the College Board website.

**IC will send your transcripts.**

## Applicants to AUB (Financial Aid)

You will have to:

1. Pick up your completed application file from the College Counseling Office
2. Submit it personally to AUB before December 15. Ask them when the application number will be ready.
3. Apply online for financial aid; you will need the application number.
4. Take your application to the admissions office ***in person*** by December 19.

## Submitting your SAT Scores (All AUB Applicants)

You may submit an unofficial SAT score report to the College Counseling Office or AUB while your official scores are being sent.

To print an unofficial score report:

- Login to [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)
- Go to each of your scores' "understand your test performance"
- Click on it you will to obtain the full SAT scores report
- Click on the print button, it will open your **full report (10 pages) in PDF format**
- Print only P.1 page (out of 10 pages) and attach it to your application
- If you already submitted your application and received an application ID#, then e-mail the PDF file to [admit@aub.edu.lb](mailto:admit@aub.edu.lb) and make sure to write your AUB Application ID#, so we can complete your file

**Any online SAT 1 format different than the above will not be accepted.**

You will need to send an official score report to AUB. To send an official report:

- Login to [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org) Request to Send Scores to universities
- Do a search for colleges; Select more search options
- Enter AUB ETS Code 0902
- Select American University of Beirut, New York, NY and add it to Your Selected Recipients
- Finalize your send score request at [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

### Important Note:

We will use the online copy temporarily to complete your file while waiting to receive the **Official SAT report** sent to AUB (ETS Code 0902).

## Applicants to AUB (Freshman Year)

If you are graduating with an IC diploma, but not with a French, Lebanese or International Baccalaureate, you will have to apply for freshman year at AUB.

The freshman program is a majorless year (2 regular semesters) whereby the student can take different courses and follow either a scientific track or a track in humanities. Once the student completes the freshman year, he/she gets to enroll in a specific major at the sophomore level based on his/her average or GPA.

Admission is competitive and equally based on the following requirements:

- 50% is based on the student high school averages in grades 10 and 11
- 50% is based on the SAT 1 exam (reading + math sections only)
- A consideration of personal qualities and academic motivation, as determined in the completed application and personal statement as well as the recommendations from teachers and school counselor.

The SAT can be taken several times; the highest scores from each section and each session are chosen. Students are compared to the average of applicants from the same school. Upon admission, students are required to present evidence of having successfully completed Grade 12 and show a level of proficiency in the English.

Minimum scores for English Language Proficiency Requirement (only **one** method needed)

- 573 on the paper based TOEFL
- 230 on the Computer Based TOEFL
- 88 on Internet Based TOEFL
- 500 on the University English Entrance Examination (EEE)
- 380 on the writing section of the SAT
- 5.5 on IELTS.

To apply, submit your application to Ms. Soubaih in the College Counseling Office by the IC deadline. If you miss the IC deadline, you will be responsible for submitting your application directly to AUB.

You must submit:

1. A completed application to the Freshman Class
2. One photo glued on to page 1
3. A photocopy of your passport/ID (if there is more than one, include both)
4. The **exact** amount of USD 80 or LL 120,000.
5. Your SAT scores as printed out from the College Board website.
6. **Two essays**

**Your teachers must submit their letters of recommendation to the College Counseling Office.**

**IC will send your transcripts, letters of recommendation, and a photocopy of your exemption paper from the Ministry of Education.**

## AUB Early Admission

To be considered for early admission, you must meet the following requirements:

1. Submission of your application by November 30
2. Class rank in the top 25 % in each of the last two years prior to applying (grades 10 and 11)
3. A minimum score of 1050 on the SAT (reading + math only), many programs require higher SAT scores

Admission decisions are issued by January 30. Admission is conditional upon the student receiving a diploma and on evidence of having met the English Language Proficiency Requirement. Applicants who apply early but are not granted early admission are automatically placed in the pool of all other applicants to the same level and same faculty/school and are given equal consideration.

## LAU (Beirut and Byblos)

### Deadlines:

- Early applications are due December 30
- Regular admission is rolling (no set deadline)

**You may submit your application to Ms. Soubaih.**

### You must submit:

- The application for admission (distributed by College Counseling Office or available at [www.admissions.lau.edu.lb/apply](http://www.admissions.lau.edu.lb/apply))
- Official scores of SAT
- Proof of language proficiency through one of the following
  - SAT I writing section
  - TOEFL
  - EEE (English Entrance Exam) administered at LAU
- Two recent passport size photos
- Clear photocopy of identity card or passport
- Application fee of \$60 or LL 90,000 (Only exact amounts will be accepted.)

### IC will submit:

- Official high school transcript for Grades 10, 11, 12
- Certified copies of all official graduation documents (IC Diploma, Baccalaureate, etc.)
- A photocopy of your exemption form from the Ministry of Education if you are applying with a CPP or IB diploma.

To request your official SAT scores to be sent directly to LAU, include the LAU code 2595 when you register for the test or later through the section “send scores” on the college board website.

## UK Universities

Programs in the UK are very focused. Students apply directly into their course of study, and often have limited choices for classes. It is therefore recommended that students have a strong sense of what they want to study if they apply to the UK.

The UCAS application **limits you to five choices**. You must apply to the same program at all the universities. The French Baccalaureate or the IB is a requirement for entry into the first year of a UK university. In most cases, it will then take you three years to receive your bachelor's degree

To apply for **Oxford** or **Cambridge**, check the UCAS website for the **different requirements**. You may apply only to one and the deadline to apply is **October 15**. If you are interested in Oxford or Cambridge, get in touch with the College Counseling Office at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Applications linked to IC

The easiest way to apply to UK universities is to link your UCAS application to IC. If you chose this method, you must do the following:

- Create a UCAS profile using the IC buzzword
- Complete the online UCAS application
- Upload your “personal statement”
- Submit a brag sheet to Ms. Assir by the deadline so she can write your reference (recommendation)
- Request paragraph-length recommendations from 1-2 teachers

Your UCAS application can only be submitted after the College Counseling Office has reviewed all the components. The deadline for most applications is January 15.

### Foundation Year:

If you hold a IC School Diploma or Lebanese Bac Diploma, you will be required to complete what is called a Foundation Year. It is offered at some universities, as well as at various institutions that specialize in just foundation years. Details are available upon request.

### Cost:

The UK generally does not provide scholarships or financial aid to undergraduates. If you do not hold a UK passport, you will pay international student rates.

### Language Proficiency:

You will need to take the IELTS language proficiency exam, for which you register online, and it is administered at the British Council at least once a month.

### Offers:

Most offers (acceptances) in the UK are “conditional,” meaning the university specifies minimum results you must obtain on your Baccalaureate exam in order to attend.

### Your Decision:

After you receive your offers, you must reply, either accepting the offer, designating the university as a back-up, or declining the offer.

### Independent Applicants (not linked to IC)

Some students/parents opt to consult external counselors or agents rather than link their applications to IC. You must inform the IC College Counseling Office if this is the case, since IC is still responsible for providing your transcript and predicted grades.

If you apply independently, the following procedure must be followed. (These are UCAS regulations, so don't try to bypass them or you might risk losing any chance of being accepted anywhere.)

1. Ask one of your teachers to write your reference. Make sure you confirm your reference by the deadline.
2. If the teacher accepts, add his/her email address and phone number to the reference page, then click "Ask referee to complete reference." UCAS will email the teacher a link and password to the reference page of your application and ask them to confirm their identity before writing it.
3. Make sure that you use the correct email address for your referee.
4. The reference must be done online
5. Pay your application fee and send your application to UCAS. You will not be able to send UCAS your application if the reference has not been completed.

### Preparing for a UK-style Interview

You may have an interview as part of your application. These are the types of questions you might expect in an interview:

1. What attracts you to this particular course?
2. Why do you want to attend.....?
3. Why do you want to study this field?
4. What is the value of studying...?
5. What do you expect to gain from your time here, apart from a qualification (diploma)?
6. What can you offer this institution?
7. What have you done to find out about this field before applying? How have you found your information?
8. What books/films/plays/ have you read/seen recently? Which is one that impressed you?
9. What grades do you expect to get on your diploma?
10. Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years' time?
11. What do you think are your strengths? Your weaknesses?

You might be asked if you have any questions. Avoid remaining silent. Some suggestions might be:

1. What are career prospects?
2. Opportunities for post-graduate research?
3. Study facilities? Libraries? Electronic documents?
4. Is the course taught in labs, tutorials, lecture halls, etc.
5. Is there an advisor for each student?
6. What is life in the residences like?

## US Universities

American universities are generally more flexible and less focused than UK universities. Most US universities have distribution requirements, meaning you will take courses in subjects outside of your major. You usually do not need to know your intended major when you apply, though it is helpful to have a sense of what subjects interest you.

If you are interested in studying Law or Medicine in the US, you can only do this if you already have your Bachelor's Degree; in other words in graduate school. There is not a discipline required for a BA/BS in order to apply to law or medicine although there are prerequisites that you would need to take while getting your undergraduate degree.

All American colleges require that a student has completed Grade 12 to qualify for admission to the Freshman Year. It takes four years to get a bachelor's degree, regardless of the qualifications you acquire in addition to your high school diploma granted by International College, although you might be able to be exempted from some Freshman requirements, depending on your test scores and Baccalaureate results.

When you apply to a university in the US, you must:

- Submit the application (Common App or the university's unique application)
- A student essay
- Request letters of recommendation by the due date
- Submit Transcript Release Forms to the College Counseling Office by the due date
- Submit a brag sheet to the College Counseling Office
- Keep track of the due dates for your applications
- Request any documents that universities want you to self-report

The College Counseling Office will send your:

- Initial transcript (grades 9-11)
- Midyear and final transcripts (including grades from grade 12)
- School profile
- Predicted grades if you are in a baccalaureate program
- Counselor recommendation
- Teacher recommendations

If you hold dual citizenship, indicate both nationalities, but list the American one as your primary nationality if you hold a US passport: that way you are not considered an international applicant.

Make sure to check the deadlines for the colleges to which you are applying as they can vary quite a bit. Also make sure to check how the colleges want the supporting documents provided. For example, UC asks you to upload your transcript yourself on your online application. If you are accepted then you have to mail the printed transcripts in sealed, signed, and stamped envelopes. Most colleges accept documents uploaded and submitted through Naviance, but others have their own portals.

Types of College Applications (US)

Although most US colleges use a single application type, the CommonApp, many of them have what is called Writing Supplements. These are additional essays the applicant must write and submit as part of the application file. Your application is not considered complete until all sections of the application *including the supplements* are complete.

Some universities (like Penn State, MIT, University of California, to mention a few) do not use the CommonApp and will require you to complete a separate application online on the university's website. These tend to be straightforward, but the College Counseling Office is available for specific questions.

Although the most common deadline for American universities is January 1, there are exceptions: for example, UC (November 30) and U of Michigan (February 2). Early applications are usually due November 1, but once again, there are exceptions. Make sure you know all of your deadlines. You are responsible for submitting your applications on time.

Admissions decisions are typically released at the beginning of April. As for responding to colleges, the official Candidate's Reply Date is May 1. If you are accepted at more than one college, respond in writing to all of them, accepting only one college and graciously declining the offers made by the others. If you don't do that then you are disadvantaging students on their waiting lists (which is unkind ☹). **Be sure to inform the College Counseling Office which college you will attend so that we can send your final transcript.** Speaking of which... if you are on a waitlist and really want that college, there is a procedure you can follow. Please come by the College Counseling Office to discuss your options.

## Canadian Universities

Canadian universities are very similar to US universities in terms of the education they provide, though they do often require that you apply directly for a major or program.

### Canadian applications:

- McGill and Concordia have their own separate online applications.
- Universities in Ontario (UofT, Waterloo, etc.) use a common application form online called the OUAC
- Each university will list the qualifications you need for specific majors. Read these carefully; they are not the same for all universities.

### Submitting Documents:

McGill requires that students self-report grades. Request a transcript from the College Counseling Office to send.

Many Canadian universities require school documents be mailed in hard copy. For universities with a high number of IC students applying, IC will provide an envelop to mail these documents. For less common universities, you may have to provide your own pre-paid envelope. Check with the College Counseling Office for more information.

### Note:

- Canadian universities generally do not request letters of recommendation unless you are applying for a scholarship. Check the requirements for your programs.
- You are an **international student even if you hold Canadian citizenship** because you have graduated from a high school outside the USA or Canada
- Canada will request proof of English language proficiency. Some will accept the IB English course; others will not. Some will insist on the IELTS or TOEFL even if you have been in the English program all your life. Read the requirements for each college carefully.
- Send your application numbers to the College Counseling Office