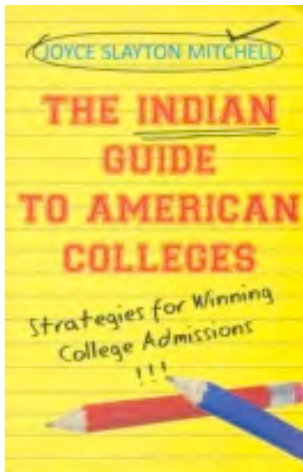


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JOYCE SLAYTON MITCHELL

THE INDIAN
GUIDE
TO AMERICAN
COLLEGES

Strategies for Winning
College Admissions





The Indian Guide to American Colleges is a best-seller in India (Hay House). The guide describes the process of finding and applying to American universities. It describes how to write the application, how to write the essay, how many colleges to apply to, how to choose a college and university. The guide describes more than 150 American universities and tells how many Asian students are enrolled, the most number of students in a major, where the students live on or off campus, and all of the things that parents and students want to know. Special features of the book tell the common mistakes that Indian students make in applying to American colleges and universities. The chapters of the book give families all of the information and help needed to apply to college so that students can apply directly. With a copy of this Indian Guide to American Colleges Ebook in hand, no need for families to pay an agent or go to a business for college applications.

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Second Edition

by Joyce Slayton Mitchell

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Chapter 5—Communications:

Personalize, Personalize, Personalize

Now here you are ready for step number three in the college selection process: communicating what you know about yourself to the deans of admissions in the colleges where you want to go. Think first that you will need a team to do the best job with these communications. Few students get into a highly selective college on their own. Finding advocates—someone to go to bat for you from your high school and in the colleges where you apply—is an important strategy that must always be in your plan to get in. Your teachers, parents, school officials, coaches, drama and music teachers, and the college rep are all on this team.

Communication Means Personalizing

Personalizing the college selection process in this age of number crunching is the strategy that will most likely help you win admission over all the other qualified applicants. Personalizing the process is the strategy that tells the dean who you are. In order to get in, however, you must first have the numbers that the college is looking for: that means the strength of your curriculum your grades, your English language testing and your SATs.

What's the Dean Looking For?

When you communicate, when you write your applications, write your essay, if you visit the campus for an interview, consider what the college deans are looking for when admitting their freshman class. While they differ in whom they take, they all use a similar basic yardstick in evaluating their applicant pool.

General Evaluation

Each applicant is evaluated by several readers within the admissions office and given an overall rating. The rating number is then brought to a committee meeting, where a decision is made by all of the admissions staff (these are the college representatives who come to your high schools, attend college fairs, and run the information sessions on their campuses). Before the admissions decision is made, the staff usually starts with evaluating six important parts to every applicant's file:

1. Transcript
2. Test scores

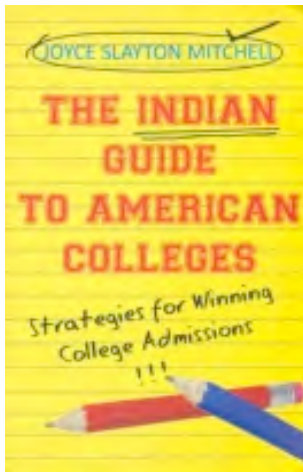
3. Application and essay
4. Teacher recommendations
5. High school's recommendation
6. Other: interview, special talent, outside recommendations

Let's be clear about the evaluation of your file. As Duke's Director of Admissions pointed out to me, these six parts are not equal; there is nothing that counts as heavily as your transcript, that is, which courses you have taken and how well you have done. Colleges put your academic work accomplished at the top of their evaluation process. Next are your test scores. Your ISC, SAT or ACT scores, usually supported by your SAT Subject Test scores have been verified over time as a reliable predictor of college success when evaluated with high school grades. Your application and essay are very valuable tools in the evaluation process. They show how well you write and how clearly you think. A creative essay can easily distinguish you from your classmates. Recommendations are very important, as teachers are the only people who have had direct contact with you as a student. They can write about your curiosity, motivation, dedication, effort, and all of those things that the dean is eager to evaluate. Because of that, you will want to choose teachers who you think will write the strongest recommendations you can get. Your school official's responsibility is to write a letter representing your high school that will summarize your academic work, speak of your personality, character, and highlight your special talents. Interviews, activities, and special talent are usually important, but unless you are a national champion in writing, acting, music, or sports, your extracurricular talents will never substitute for meeting the academic requirements the college is looking

Standing Out: Special Talent

Special talent can make a big difference. We think of sports, because sports are often the most-talked-about talent, but each of you has some special talent that you will want to highlight on your own application. Some of you are outstanding musicians, writers, actors, poets, editors, innovators, photographers, and leaders. Others of you have a strong social conscience, unique hobbies, or an unusual background. Maybe being committed to community service or from a farmer's family in Southern India with great English skills is your special talent. Admissions committees are always looking for the strongest points in your folder—things that set you apart from other applicants, ways that you distinguish yourself from your classmates. Your special talents are what make you interesting. Colleges look for a well-rounded class, not a group of well-rounded students. Distinguish yourself!

How can you stand out in the application pool? Former dean at Penn, Eric J. Kaplan asks, “Amid all of those shifting currents, what do those of us who make decisions value most in a candidate? First of all, we want to see academic commitment and initiative, a rigorous scholastic record, and demonstrated excellence in nonclassroom activities.” To stand out in nonacademics at Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Stanford, the most selective colleges in the United States, you have to do something truly exceptional, such as making the junior Olympic team, be a founder of a start-up business about to go public, hold a patent, or publish a book. That’s outstanding. That’s the international arena of competition. Next, it takes a state or regional achievement to be almost the most outstanding such as a finalist in an English Speaking Competition, an equestrian rating, winning the regional squash team competition, first seat in state orchestra, published poetry, top violin in Bangladesh. If you are from a top-rated high school, you know how much talent, time, and focus it takes to be a student government leader. Local area leadership isn’t as outstanding as the regional or national levels, but it can still separate you from your classmates. Think globally as you think of the competition for admission. After all, that’s what the evaluation is—a global measure as opposed to a measure by your own teachers and school. But don’t get overwhelmed by the thought. Your responsibility is to do your best within your own interests, abilities, and values. Finding authentic seventeen-year-olds with their own voice is very high on the list of top picks for deans of admissions.



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