

Shrewsbury
School

Applying to
US Universities

Introduction

Interest in studying in the US for university has seen significant growth in recent years both nationally and at Shrewsbury, though the school has a long history of supporting pupils in applying to American universities.

The allure of the broader curriculum offered across the Atlantic, the emphasis on the holistic, all-round individual and the sheer number of opportunities offered are some of the reasons for this increase in interest, to the point that roughly 10% of the Upper Sixth in each year will take up places in North America.

This booklet's aim is to provide information on what studying in the US is like but more importantly how Shrewsbury supports pupils in researching their options and in navigating the various application processes, which are very different to those of the UK. Though on the surface, attending an American university may seem very appealing, it is not for everybody and it is crucial that those interested do thorough research to ensure it is the right fit.

Often the elephant in the room when looking at the US is finance; it can be an expensive option in comparison to the UK, with tuition at some universities costing over \$80,000 a year. It is important for parents and pupils to have an honest conversation on how much the family will be able and prepared to pay. There is sometimes incredibly generous financial aid available (up to 100%) but this is limited. Searching for the Harvard and Yale Finance calculators online will give a rough indicator of how much it might cost.

The Head of Higher Education, who is responsible for all university applications, both in the UK and worldwide, is happy to meet parents and pupils to discuss the process.



The US vs the UK

The main difference between the US and the UK in the university system is that the US is generally much broader in scope than the UK.

Whereas in the UK, you will typically study one subject for three years with a narrow focus, in the US, there is usually a much wider range of courses that a student will take over four years.

Indeed, there are many colleges where you apply to the institution generally rather than for a specific subject, with the specialism (a major) only being declared after the first year. It is common to have a core curriculum that all students have to study, regardless of final specialism, which includes, sciences, humanities and languages. With over 4,500 colleges in the US, each with its own approach, the sheer breadth of possibilities is hard to comprehend.

Another major draw of US colleges is the facilities and opportunities available. Those looking for sports scholarships will see professional-level resources and in many respects, will be treated as professionals studying for a degree. From world class gyms and trainers to stadia that seat up to 100,000, an athlete will have a very different experience in the US than at nearly all UK universities. Equally, the philanthropic endowments at many universities allow for phenomenal research and academic centres; it



is no surprise therefore that there are 56 US universities in the world top 200.

It is important to highlight that it is not possible to study medicine or law in the US as an undergraduate. Though there are academic tracks available to facilitate these paths, they are only studied at postgraduate level.

Testing: the SAT and ACT

As the US school system does not have national exams and works on a GPA (grade point average), traditionally universities have used either the SAT or ACT as standardised admissions tests to discriminate between applicants fairly.

The tests are fairly similar, with a focus on Maths and English, though the ACT also has a science section (mainly manipulating data rather than knowledge of the subjects). Universities accept both in equal measure, so there is no preferred test from their view.

This is a useful overview of the two tests and their differences: **ACT vs SAT: 11 Key Differences to Help You Pick the Right Test:** <https://blog.prepscholar.com/act-vs-sat>

Due to the Covid pandemic, many universities removed this requirement to increase fairness and so there are now three approaches to how they use the tests:

- ✿ **Test Required:** these universities (like MIT and Georgetown) require the SAT or ACT to be taken as part of their admissions process.
- ✿ **Test Blind:** these universities (like the University of California) will not use the test scores in their admissions process.
- ✿ **Test Optional:** most universities fit into this category. This means that you are welcome to submit SAT or ACT scores, which will be considered as part of the admissions process, but you are not required to do so.

Our advice is that the SAT/ACT can be a very helpful thing to have in an application if it is a good score, as it gives universities a benchmark of academic potential. They will then focus their attention on the other parts of the application, like the essays and references. A number of universities have also told us that though they are technically test optional, they expect applicants to submit scores to have a realistic chance of admission.

Shrewsbury has been an SAT centre for over a decade, which means that Salopians do not need to go far to take the test. We also offer a training programme in the Michaelmas and Lent Terms of Lower Sixth, which is run by a specialist company. Most students will take the SAT/ACT a few times, with the first sitting in March/May of the Lower Sixth and possibly in September/October of the Upper Sixth.

The application process

Unlike the UK's UCAS, there is not a singular application portal for the US.

Though the majority of the most popular universities use a platform called Common App, there are many that have their own portals (MIT, the University of California). This is why it is important to create shortlists as early as possible, so that there are no surprises.

What do I need to apply?

This varies from university to university. At the bare minimum, they will want a transcript of grades. The Head of Higher Education can provide these; for those who join Shrewsbury in the Sixth Form, they will need to supply electronic copies of their previous certificates too.

For the Common App, there is a single essay that is needed for all applications, which is based on one of 7 or 8 prompts.

Each university will then require a series of small essays and questions. The Head of Higher Education is happy to work through these with

applicants; though personal, guidance on how to convey the right message is important.

Types of application:

There are three types of application that have different deadlines and implications:

- ✿ **Early Decision:** an option to apply to your first choice university earlier (1st November) with a binding contract to go there if offered a place. Applicants are statistically more likely to be accepted in this method but it is very important to stress that if offered a place, an applicant has to turn down all other offers worldwide.
- ✿ **Early Action:** a similar option to Early Decision, without the legally binding element. The benefit is that decisions are released in December.
- ✿ **Regular Decision:** with a deadline typically of 1st January, the standard way to apply to US colleges.

The application timeline: the right fit

As mentioned earlier, it is important to conduct thorough research when looking at US universities. The key message is that the admissions processes will focus on fit and whether the applicant will be a suitable student at that university.

Each will have their own idea of what their ideal students will be like; MIT will have very different criteria to Boston University, which is on the opposite bank of the Charles River. Here is a rough timeline of what happens when:

5th Form:

- ✿ LT: Introductory webinars and meetings to explore the possibilities on offer.
- ✿ ST: World Universities Fair at Shrewsbury
Meeting with the Head of Higher Education on how to create a list of universities.

L6 Form:

- ✿ MT: Meeting with the Head of Higher Education to start creating a list
Connect with US universities on the longlist (webinars, virtual open days)
2nd half: SAT preparation.
- ✿ LT: Meeting with the Head of Higher Education to create a shortlist of universities
Webinar / Meeting with OS studying in the US
1st half: SAT preparation and possibly taking the tests
2nd half: workshop on application preparation.
- ✿ ST: World Universities Fair at Shrewsbury
Meeting with the Head of Higher Education to plan essays and applications, and to arrange which teachers will write letters of recommendation.

U6 Form:

- ✿ MT: Meeting with the Head of Higher Education to finalise essays and applications
Early Decision/Action deadline: typically 1st November
Regular Decision deadline: typically 1st January.

How to choose

The key advice for a successful application is to pick the universities that are the right fit for you as a student: which institutions will value your various skills and abilities most highly and whose values and aims align with yours? This is why careful research and engaging with universities from early in the Lower Sixth is important.

One tool that Shrewsbury uses is called Corsava. It asks a barrage of about 150 questions about what you are looking for in your university education, covering topics like size, specialism, campus vibe, activities and location. This then creates a list of possible universities for the Head of Higher Education to discuss. To try it out for free, use this link: <https://site.corsava.com/student/setup>

There are some very useful resources to help form an idea of what universities are like. A key book is the Fiske Guide, which is published every year. Copies are kept in the Futures Department for pupils to use.

Some universities use **demonstrated interest** as part of their admissions criteria. This means that they track an applicant's interactions with them to gauge how keen they are in finding out about them, from questions asked at a webinar to if they click a link on an e-newsletter. It is always worth keeping this in mind.

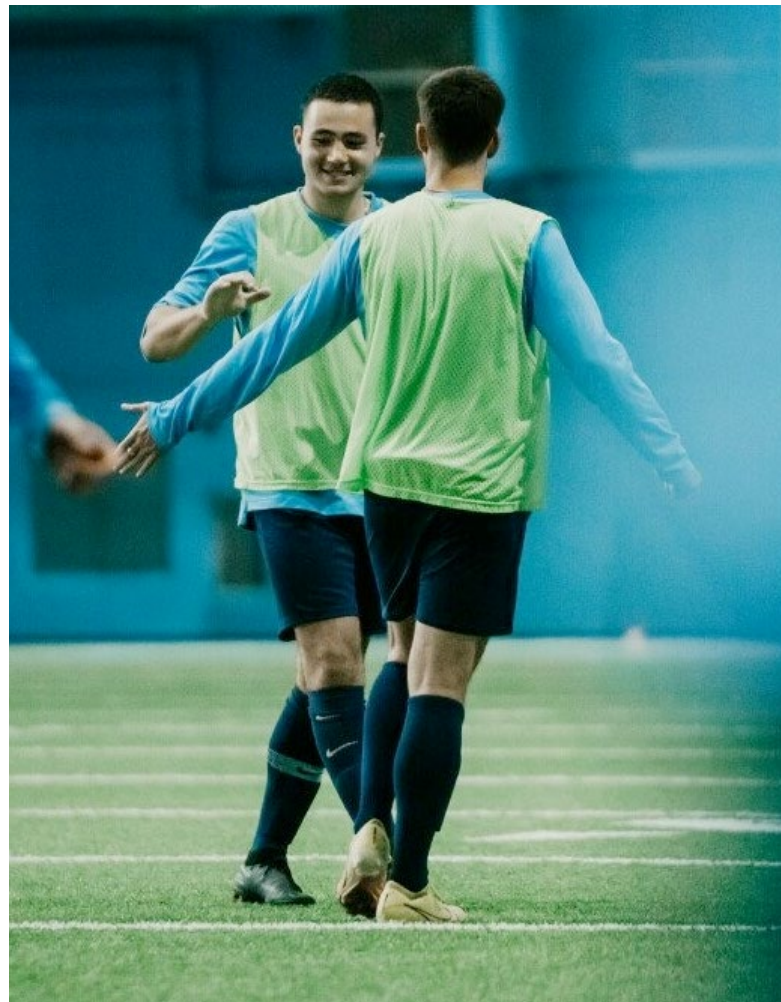
The timeline will provide an idea of when application decisions need to be made. Our advice is to apply to a handful of universities only (between five and eight maximum), as each application takes a considerable amount of time and to rush is most likely going to end in rejection.

Sport Scholarships

A significant proportion of Salopians who head to the US for university each year go on Sport Scholarships, with rowing and football (soccer) being the most popular.

There are strict rules from the NCAA (the governing body for college sport) on when coaches can and can't make contact with potential athletes. As a rule of thumb, they will start engaging from the middle of June of the Fifth Form.

Shrewsbury is well versed in supporting pupils through the scholarship process, though the nature of it is very personal and the relationship between coaches and athletes is a key one. The school can provide footage and showreels where needed, as well as produce transcripts and sporting CVs that pupils can supply to coaches.



Nearly every team will have a recruiting section of their websites and the first step is to register interest in this way. This will start the dialogue between coaches and athletes. Equally, the teachers in charge of sports can offer advice (particularly with Rowing).

Should I use an agent?

There is a multitude of sports agencies that provide a bespoke service for potential athletes; their charges vary depending on the level of service, but it is not unusual for them to cost between £1,500 and £3,000. Though not necessary by any stretch, the agents have relationships with universities and coaches, and will know which teams need which positions in any given year. Shrewsbury does not endorse any particular agent but can offer guidance on ones used by Salopian families in the past.

Finance

This really is the first question any family interested in the US need to answer, as it is very likely that it will cost something to go to an American university.

Fees can be as high at \$80,000 a year (though that includes food and board), with no availability of federal loans or UK student finance.

A large number of universities will offer financial aid in some form, though this varies significantly between universities and it is normally always means-tested. The CSS form, which is used by nearly all universities, goes into significant detail on household income.

When looking at finance, two terms are important to understand:

- Need Blind:** these universities will not look at financial need when making a decision about whether to accept an applicant. Most commit to providing up to 100% of the fees (known as full-ride) based on the financial aid forms after an applicant has been offered a place.
- Need Aware:** these universities will ask for financial declarations before making a decision, and this will form part of their decision-making as to whether to offer a place. An offer will come with the financial aid calculations.

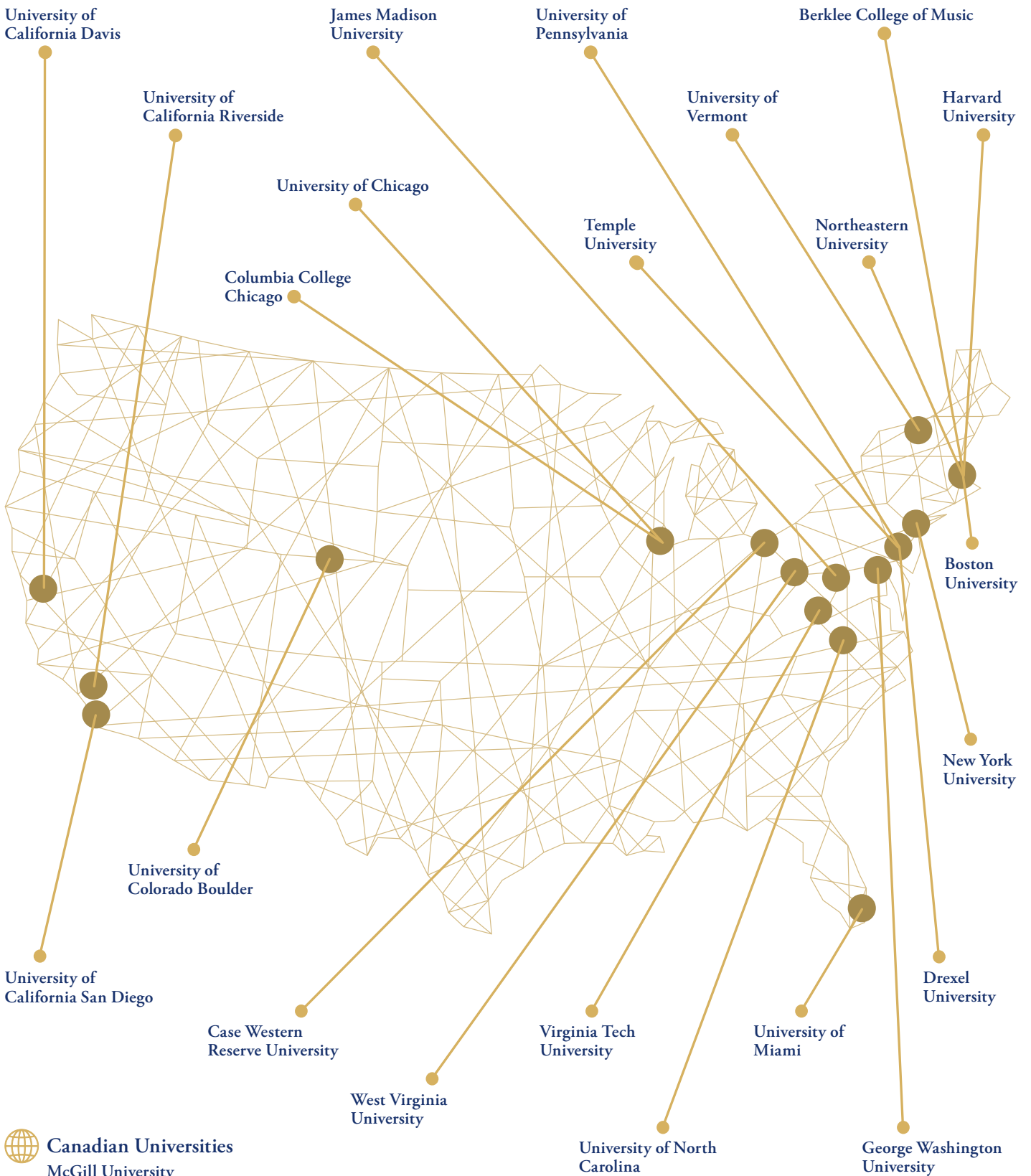
There are scholarships available to some US universities. Many are automatically considered when applying but there are some



merit-based scholarships that require separate applications. Shrewsbury is a nominating school for the following scholarships and interested applicants need to discuss this with the Head of Higher Education early in the Lower Sixth if interested.

- The Morehead Cain scholarship:** a 100% scholarship to the University of North Carolina.
- The Robertson scholarship:** a 100% scholarship to the University of North Carolina and Duke University.
- The Jefferson scholarship:** a 100% scholarship to the University of Virginia.

2024 US University Offers



-  **Canadian Universities**
McGill University
University of Toronto
University of British Columbia
Western University

Glossary

The following are common terms used in applications to the US.

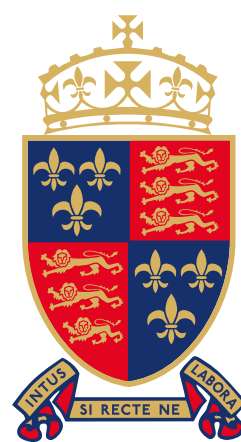
- ✦ **College:** an undergraduate institution that only provides a 2 or 4 year degree. They are sometimes included as part of a university (e.g. Harvard College is the undergraduate arm of Harvard University).
- ✦ **University:** an institution that provides both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees.
- ✦ **Common App:** a common platform to apply to over 800 colleges with one main application.
- ✦ **GPA (Grade Points Average):** the way US schools provide quantitative judgement. The highest is usually 4.0 (equivalent to straight A and A*) and there is a sliding scale (3.0 is roughly equivalent to Cs).
- ✦ **Ivy League:** a group of 8 private universities that play sport against each other. They have the cache of name recognition.
- ✦ **Letters of recommendation:** the school references that are required by universities. The Head of Higher Education acts as the Counsellor, though that reference is written



by the HsM. Some universities require teacher recommendations, which should be from core subjects where possible. Some allow other recommendations from other notables but this should be discussed with the Head of Higher Education.

- ✦ **Liberal Arts College:** a type of university that has a broad curriculum with compulsory elements.
- ✦ **Major:** a subject area on which a student focuses their attention.
- ✦ **Minor:** a subject area with a secondary focus for a student.

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