In the following report, Hanover Research explores undergraduate international student admission practices and standards for a large group of institutions. The report presents an overview of trends among these institutions for various admissions requirements and standards.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

The following report investigates policies and procedures for undergraduate international student admissions at 59 institutions. This report summarizes Hanover’s findings about 10 aspects of international student admissions among these institutions.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Institutions are equally likely to use the Common Application or an institutional application.** About half of the examined institutions either use the Common Application exclusively or allow students the option of using it. Some institutions use the Common Application but supplement it with institution-specific questions.

- **Most institutions still require supporting documents to be submitted in hard copy.** Transcripts, in particular, must often be submitted directly from the student’s school, and may need to be accompanied by a certified translation. However, some institutions allow some supporting documents, such as letters of recommendation, to be submitted electronically.

- **Most institutions require an essay or personal statement from international applicants.** Of the 59 examined institutions, only 13 do not require an essay or personal statement. Most require either an essay or a personal statement, but not both, although a minority of institutions require both or allow students to choose.

- **The majority of institutions examined for this report require one to two letters of recommendation.** However, a notable minority (16 institutions) do not require these letters. A few give students the option of submitting letters, particularly for applicants interested in competing for scholarships.

- **Proof of financial support, in the form of a letter or bank statement, is almost universally required among these institutions.** Although a small number of institutions do not explicitly require this documentation as part of the application process for international students, visa requirements effectively mean that any international applicant will need to demonstrate financial support.

- **Transcripts typically must be submitted in hard copy, and some institutions require verification by third parties such as World Education Services.** Where an English translation is required, this too must typically be certified or notarized. Just under half of the examined institutions also expressly require students to submit results for exit examinations they have taken, such as the British A-Levels, Cambridge Pre-U, German Abitaur, or French Baccalaureat.

- **Standardized test scores (i.e., SAT or ACT) are required from international applicants at approximately half of the examined institutions.** A small number (nine institutions) do not require these tests of international applicants, but the remainder of the institutions examined either require submission of test scores by
some international applicants (e.g., those from English-speaking countries) or strongly encourage it for all international applicants. For the most part, institutions do not publish minimum standards for standardized test scores or for GPAs.

- **Almost all institutions examined for this report set explicit English language proficiency requirements for international applicants.** The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are the most commonly used tests, although some institutions accept other benchmarks as well, such as SAT Critical Reading or ACT English scores. Typical TOEFL score standards are around 550 for the paper-based test, 80 or 90 for the Internet-based test, and 200 for the computer-based test. Typical IELTS score standards are around 6.0.

- **Approximately one-third of these institutions offer conditional admission for international applicants.** Conditional admission is almost always predicated on the applicant improving their English proficiency, and may be paired with a “bridge program” or other resources that assist applicants in improving their language skills. Conditional admission may still require a minimum level of proficiency, albeit lower than that required for standard admission. For instance, the University of Iowa requires a TOEFL Internet-based score of 80 for standard admission, and requires at least a 57 on the TOEFL internet-based test for conditional admission.
OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSION PRACTICES

This section briefly considers some current issues in international student admissions, and provides an overview of Hanover’s review of institutional practices. Particular interest is paid to traditional elements of admissions processes for international students, such as standardized examinations, and the importance of English language skills in admissions standards.

ISSUES IN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADMISSIONS

In general, institutional practices for admitting international students vary. As the National Association for College Admission Counseling advises international students, “in the US, admission testing requirements and policies vary by college and university.” Hanover’s review of institutional policies for international student admissions, summarized below, confirms this.

Research provides only limited guidance for institutions in setting appropriate admissions standards for international applicants. Studies have found some correlation between international students’ standardized test scores (e.g., SAT, GRE) and future academic performance as measured by GPA. At the undergraduate level, correlation has been found between the SAT Math section and undergraduate GPA, but not between the SAT Verbal section and GPA.

Although English-language proficiency may be an important factor in predicting student success, some U.S. institutions have attempted to overcome this hurdle by using conditional admission for international students with strong academic skills but weak language skills, allowing students to strengthen language abilities once admitted. These types of admissions are often called “intensive English enrollments,” and several institutions have reported a distinct increase in enrollments as a result of such admissions policies that feature remedial language programs.

A different kind of problem has developed in recent years as some international students, particularly from China, have used falsified credentials to gain admission to U.S. universities. This practice owes in part to a reliance on education agents and consultants who act as intermediaries to shepherd foreign students through the application process at U.S.

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4 Ibid.
institutions. The results of such practices are disheartening. A Chinese consulting company, Zinch, published a report in 2012 that found “90 percent of Chinese applicants submit false recommendations, 70 percent have other people write their personal essays, 50 percent have forged high school transcripts, and 10 percent list academic awards and other achievements they did not receive.”

These examples leave university administrators with a difficult choice of how to boost international student enrollments without lowering educational standards and opening their doors to underprepared applicants. Changing admissions standards presents “formidable challenges to the integrity of college admission,” yet also “offers an opportunity for reflection about how the standards of practice and institutional missions apply to the state of college admission, which is undergoing a period of dynamic transition.”

**Review of Institutional Practices**

Hanover researched institutional practices at 59 institutions across the following dimensions:

- Application type (common or institutional);
- Application requirements, e.g., essay, letters of recommendation, transcripts, test results;
- Document submission methods, e.g., original hard copy, online;
- Admission standards, such as GPA or standardized test standards;
- English language proficiency standards, such as TOEFL or IELTS scores; and
- Conditional admission possibilities.

This subsection contains analysis of Hanover’s findings for each topic.

**Application Type**

Of the 59 institutions, 20 use the Common Application alone; 12 allow applicants to choose either an institutional application or the Common Application; and 24 use only an institutional application. Multiple institutions employ the Common Application with an institutional supplement. This supplement consists of specific questions or writing topics pertaining to the institution. In Seattle University’s supplement, for example, applicants are asked to write an essay of between 100 and 500 words in answer to the question: “What

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http://books.google.com/books?id=QN4kAgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

6 ibid., p. 115.

http://www.academia.edu/3369994/Supporting_International_Applicants_and_Promoting_an_Ethical_Model_of_Global_College_Admission
are you most looking forward to in your college experience, and in what ways would Seattle University support those interests and aspirations?\(^8\)

**DOCUMENT SUBMISSION METHODS**

The most common practice in the submission of applications and supporting documents is to offer an online application but to require that all supporting documents be originals or certified copies and sent from their respective sources. Institutions also require certified translations of any documents not written in English. Fordham University, for example, requires the following:\(^9\)

All transcripts should be original documents submitted directly from your school to Fordham University’s Office of Undergraduate Admission or copies certified by the school or an EducationUSA center. If the transcript is in a foreign language, please provide an English language translation of the document with your application. If applicable, please also provide any national testing results, for example, GCSE, CXC, ICSE results or projected results for IB, A levels, etc.

Most institutions do not allow supporting documents to be delivered electronically, such as via email or fax. Exceptions to this rule, however, do exist, such as Case Western Reserve University, which allows most documents to be submitted electronically,\(^10\) or Boston College, which makes forms available through the Common Application for the submission of letters of recommendation and transcripts.\(^11\)

Many institutions do not set specific guidelines for document submission, but merely indicate that documents should be originals or certified copies.

**ESSAYS/PERSONAL STATEMENTS**

Thirty-one of the examined institutions require an essay, 17 require a personal statement, seven require both an essay and a personal statement, three require an essay or a personal statement, and 13 require neither.

**LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**

Forty institutions require letters of recommendation, while 16 do not, and three institutions make them optional but recommended, especially for scholarship consideration. Most institutions require letters of recommendation to be sent in hard copy from the recommenders directly to the admissions office, often with certification or a signature across the envelope flap. Letters of recommendation come from teachers and school officials, and usually one or two are required.

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\(^11\) “Application Requirements.” Boston College. http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/admission/undergrad/process/freshman/requirements.html
**Demonstration of Financial Security**

Institutions require international applicants to provide demonstrations of financial security through letters of financial support and bank statements. Fifty of the institutions clearly state the need for a letter of financial support, while 45 clearly state the need for a bank statement. Note, however, that even those institutions that do not state a requirement for such indications of financial security may still require them as part of an application for an F-1 visa. In order to obtain a student visa, applicants must submit a Form I-20 issued by the institution they will be attending. This form requires proof of financial ability to pay for at least one year of studies.

American University, for example, has a “Certification of Finances for International Students” (CFIS) form that is used to verify financial security for both F-1 and J-1 visas. Upon completion and verification of this form, American University issues future students either an I-20 or DS-2019 form which they can present when applying for a student visa (J-1 visas, however, are used for exchange students, rather than full-time international applicants). The CFIS form requires disclosure of available funds from both the student and any sponsor of the student. The form must be accompanied by bank statements: “For each source of funding, you must attach financial documents in English or with a notarized English translation, on bank letterhead, with a bank official’s signature, bank stamp or seal, and dated within the last three months of the date of submission to American University.”

Thus, because of the necessity of proving financial security in order to obtain a student visa, even those institutions that do not clearly state the requirement of financial documentation at the time of application ultimately require it if the applicant is to actually attend campus.

**Transcripts and Exit Exam Results**

All of the institutions reviewed require official transcripts from international applicants. These transcripts most often must be sent directly from schools in hard copy. Documents in languages other than English must be accompanied by official translations. Some institutions, such as The Catholic University of America, require that transcripts be verified by a credential evaluation organization such as World Education Services (WES) or the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO): “All transcripts issued from outside the United States must be certified by a recognized evaluator of international educational records (such as WES or AACRAO), even if in the English language.”

In order to obtain credential certification from WES, students must submit original documents to the organization, which then prepares an official credential evaluation report which can be sent to multiple institutions.

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14 “Get Your Education Recognized in the U.S.” WES. http://www.wes.org/students/index.asp
Hanover identified 25 institutions that specifically require exit examination results, such as the British A-Levels, Cambridge Pre-U, German Abitur, or French Baccalaureat. One institution, the University of Iowa, recommends their submission for scholarship consideration. The other 23 institutions do not make explicit mention of exit examination results in their application instructions.

Institutions do not always specify whether or not they require applicants to submit the results of exit examinations. The Common Application often requires the reporting of such examination results. The Common Application to Georgetown University, for example, asks “Is promotion within your educational system based upon standard leaving examinations given at the end of lower and/or senior secondary school by a state or national leaving examinations board?” If the applicant answers affirmatively, he or she is asked to fill in the scores for all exams.¹⁵

**STANDARDIZED TESTS**

The most common practice regarding standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT is to require them; 28 of the identified institutions require all applicants, whether domestic or international, to take at least one of the standardized tests. Eight institutions require test scores from students in English-speaking countries or who attended secondary school in English-speaking countries, but make them optional for all others. Fourteen institutions make them optional for all international students, but encourage their submission, while nine do not require them at all.

**ADMISSION GRADE/SCORE STANDARDS**

Very few institutions make use of GPA or standardized test score admission standards. Only five institutions have GPA standards, and none of the identified institutions has SAT or ACT standards. The five that have standards in place are:

- Indiana University – Bloomington – Unofficial standard of a B average¹⁶
- Ohio University – Varies by applicant’s country of secondary education¹⁷
- Seattle University – 3.0 GPA¹⁸
- University of Toledo – Varies by college, between 2.0 and 3.0 GPA¹⁹
- Wright State University – Varies by program²⁰

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¹⁵ Georgetown University Common Application. https://www.commonapp.org/ca4app#1c/0/2?sid=2&t=1404416607975
¹⁸ “Admission Requirements.” Seattle University. http://www.seattleu.edu/undergraduate-admissions/international/requirements/
¹⁹ “Undergraduate Admission Requirements for New International Students.” The University of Toledo. http://www.utoledo.edu/admission/international/requirements.html
**ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY STANDARDS**

Of the 59 institutions, 54 have explicit English language proficiency standards, while five do not specify any standards. The most common standard is the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), followed by the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Typical TOEFL score standards are around 550 for the paper-based test, 80 or 90 for the internet-based test, and 200 for the computer-based test. Typical IELTS score standards are around 6.0.

In addition to language test scores, many institutions accept SAT Critical Reading scores and ACT English scores as proof of English proficiency. Applicants can sometimes demonstrate proficiency through past coursework or attendance of an English-language high school, as well.

**CONDITIONAL ADMISSION**

Many institutions offer conditional admission for students who do not meet English proficiency requirements. Hanover identified conditional admission policies at 19 of the reviewed institutions. Conditional admission usually requires that students meet all other admission requirements except English proficiency, and consists of allowing students to enroll in a limited number of for-credit courses while they complete remedial English courses or training.

Some institutions have English language proficiency standards in place for conditional admission as well as regular admission. For example, the University of Iowa offers conditional admission for students scoring between 57 and 79 on the TOEFL internet-based test, 450 and 529 on the TOEFL paper-based test, or 4.5 with no sub-score lower than 4.0 on the IELTS.21

**OTHER PRACTICES**

Certain institutions have unique admission requirements or procedures. Georgetown University, for example, requires students to interview with Georgetown alumni, and Butler University requires a résumé outlining applicants’ activities and honors.22

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