



US University Applications at Charterhouse



The US university system

US universities are becoming more and more popular- currently America is the most popular study abroad destination for UK students!

The US university system differs strikingly from the UK university system, and can seem very complex. There are 4500+ universities in the US, and rather than focusing on applicants' subject interests and grades, they assess applicants in a more holistic way. Admission officers in the US want to know applicants' personal identities and interests, in addition to their academic profiles, make them a good fit for their college; therefore, they give more weight to students' extracurricular activities, and require students to write personal essays. The vast majority of US universities also require standardised tests (the SAT or ACT and SAT Subject Tests).

In the US, students attend university for four years, and their first year is spent taking courses from a range of subjects, including maths, sciences, humanities, literature, history, and arts. Thus, the US system particularly suits those students who haven't yet determined their specialised course of study, what career they want to pursue, or students with an interest in multiple and/or varied subjects. Additionally, US universities typically provide students with more contact hours in lectures and discussion seminars than do UK universities; have amazing facilities for studying, living, and leisure; and offer students the opportunity to experience a new culture.

Applying to the US requires a determined and committed approach, but with planning and a bit of time management on the student's part, it is manageable, and definitely worth the effort for those who would benefit from the educational model described above.

Application portals

Students are responsible for signing up for and putting personal information into the relevant application portals. The most widely used is the [Common Application](#), which, like UCAS, allows students to apply to multiple universities through one portal. The [Universities of California](#) (a 10-university group including UC Berkeley and UCLA) have a separate application portal (and an earlier application deadline!) Other universities, like [Georgetown](#) and [MIT](#), have their own individual application portals, whilst still others, including the University of Washington, will request the [Coalition Application](#).

The student must be aware of how many portals he or she must use for application, and be sure to meet the requirements of each in advance of the application deadline. Additionally, the student is responsible for nominating careers@charterhouse.org.uk in the relevant portals well in advance of the deadlines, so that the Careers office has sufficient time to

upload the necessary supporting documents to a student's application. (See the section below for a list of important deadlines).

Standardised testing

As part of their US applications, students need to take a timed standardised test called the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or ACT (American College Test), and submit their scores to colleges. The vast majority of colleges accept scores from either test, and all colleges (with one exception, the Curtis Institute of Music, which requires the SAT) give equal weighting to both tests. Students should begin preparation in OQ of their 1YS year, take their first test at the end of OQ, and their second in the early CQ of the same academic year.

What constitutes a "good" score depends on the college to which the student is applying, but it is important to remember that this is only one part of the application. You can think of it as the "foot through the door" – do well enough and a college will look at the rest of the application.

To prepare for the SAT or ACT, students should take the diagnostic test offered free online by our partner, UES Education, and take the relevant test preparation course offered to 1YS students at school in the autumn. If this is not feasible for the student, we would recommend private tuition (in a group or one-on-one setting). Generally, our students do around twenty hours of tuition to be ready for the test. These tests are very different from anything students will have encountered before in UK schools, and require them to learn new content as well as hone their testing technique.

Note, however, that a course or tuition alone is not enough preparation to do well in these tests. Students are expected to put in many weeks and months of practice, and this is the best way to improve scores.

Below are the recent upcoming dates for the tests, as well as registration deadlines:

	Test date	Registration deadline
SUBJECT TESTS ONLY	Saturday 1 June	3 May
ACT	Friday 7 or Saturday 8 June	3 May
ACT	Friday 13 or Saturday 14 September	9 August
SAT OR SUBJECT TESTS	Saturday 5 October	6 September
ACT	Friday 25 or Saturday 26 October	20 September
SUBJECT TESTS ONLY	Saturday 2 November	4 October
SAT OR SUBJECT TESTS	Saturday 7 December	8 November
ACT	Friday 13 or Saturday 14 December	8 November

These tests are **not** taken at Charterhouse. Pupils must register to take tests at local testing centres. These are booked up quickly and so early application to take the tests is recommended. Information about registering for tests and where tests can be taken can be found at:

SAT: <https://www.collegeboard.org>

ACT: <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-non-us.html>

Teacher and counsellor recommendations

The Common Application requires two recommendation letters from subject teachers. Students must not use their tutors or any other pastoral staff for these references: they must get references from teachers who have taught them a particular academic subject! Students should choose teachers not only based on their performance in their classes, but also on how well the teacher will be able to speak to their character, as this is crucial in American-style references.

Charterhouse beaks will receive guidance on how to write US-style references, and can get feedback on these references from the Careers office.

Students should check the recommendation requirements for all the schools to which they are applying, as some schools will have specific rules about the references: for example, MIT requires that one reference be written by a humanities teacher.

Due to the nature of the Common Application system, students must manage the teacher recommendation process: the school cannot do this for them. It is the student's responsibility to choose teachers, ask those teachers if they are happy to write the references, invite those teachers on the Common App, and check (via the student's Common App account) that the references have been uploaded by teachers.

Students also are required to submit a counsellor reference. This is written by the student's housemaster and submitted online via the Careers office. It is the student's responsibility to ask housemasters for these references and provide housemasters with a questionnaire listing their accomplishments, to ensure the housemaster is able to write a strong reference. The Careers office emails these questionnaires to students at the beginning of the autumn term, and they will need to fill them in in detail before passing them on to housemasters.

Extracurricular activities

The US puts a particular emphasis on extracurricular activities, which include sport, music, drama, work or work experience, volunteering, and cultural and/or religious activities. Students should ensure their involvement with these sorts of activities throughout high/secondary school. Particularly, US universities like to see long-term involvement in one or two activities, in particular, activities that show leadership and community service. They also take into consideration the competitiveness of activities (such as competing at national or international level at sport).

Students should make sure to stay involved with those activities that they have pursued over a number of years, and seek out opportunities for development within them over time. It is tempting to drop activities in the 1YS and 2YS years to focus on exams, but this can put US applicants at a disadvantage.

Essays

Students must write a considerable number of essays to apply to US universities. For the Common Application, they must write a 650-word personal essay; they must also write supplementary essays for each individual college to which they are applying. Some colleges require one supplementary essay; others may require several, in addition to short-answer questions.

If a student is applying to the Universities of California, he or she must write different essays: the UC application portal requires four 350-word personal essays; the prompts are quite similar to those for the Common App.

So, if a student is applying to 6-8 US colleges, he or she can expect to write 20+ essays. The Common App essay should go through 3-4 drafts, and the others should go through at least two. However, it is important to keep in mind that this is just a rule of thumb: students who struggle with writing may need more than this.

It is very important for students to be aware of how many essays they need to write well ahead of the deadline, and make a plan to manage their time accordingly.

Transcripts

If a student has not attended Charterhouse since Year 10, he or she will need to provide a transcript (an academic record of GCSE grades or, in other curricula, the grades received in each of years 10, 11, and 12 that were spent at another school). You may already have received such a transcript when the student left his or her previous school; if not, contact the administrative office there to request a transcript, and email the transcript to careers@charterhouse.org.uk.

If the student has attended Charterhouse in the Underschool, Mrs. Potter in the Careers office has a transcript she can upload, and no further action is required on the part of the student.

Additional materials

There are 4500+ US colleges, all with their own specific application requirements. At times, students are asked to upload other information to their applications, so it is crucial that students check the requirements for each university well in advance of deadlines, so they don't get taken by surprise and risk handing in documents late!

For example, students applying to art schools may be asked to upload a portfolio; music schools may require an audition. Princeton asks for a writing sample, and Dartmouth asks for a recommendation letter written by a peer. Other universities may ask for transcripts from international applicants to be certified by an external body or officially translated into English in order to be considered. These are only a few examples, so do check all requirements!

Charterhouse's provision for applications to the US

Charterhouse works with UES Education, the leading provider of US application support to UK schools. They provide a test preparation course at school and an in-house US applications consultant, Dr Loni Reynolds. Dr Reynolds is in once a fortnight in LQ, once a week in CQ and twice a week in OQ.

As there are a high number of US applicants each year and she is in school for a set number of hours, Dr Reynolds' time with each student is limited. It is important that students make an effort to attend all sessions and meetings that she sets with them, and adhere to all deadlines set by Dr Reynolds and the Careers office.

Dr Reynolds will help students with the below:

- Holding informational group sessions about the application requirements of US universities, and informing students about how to research their college lists
- Holding 15-30 minute one-on-one meetings with students. Students can generally expect one or two meetings per term.
- Sending reports to students and parents updating them on students' application progress and suggesting plans of action
- Holding workshops guiding students through the essay writing and editing process
- Briefly reviewing essays and providing big-picture feedback
- Assisting students with using application portals and queries that may arise

However, students may find that they need in-depth help with their US applications beyond what Dr Reynolds can provide. If they need personalised support through the US application process, including things like expert assistance in researching their college lists; drafting, writing, and editing essays; assembling an artistic portfolio or musical audition; and/or applying for scholarships and funding, we would suggest an external consultant.

When considering consultancy, it is important to choose a consultant who is both ethical and knowledgeable about the US system in particular. We would recommend consultants who are members of the International Association for College Admission Counselling (IACAC). UES is an IACAC member and provides a consultancy service that is tailored to the needs of each student and the demands of US applications in each academic year. If you are interested in this, please contact our director Simon Lewis at simon@ueseducation.com to set up a call.

At Charterhouse, we stream US applicants into two groups: those who are working with external consultants and those who are not. If a student is not working with a consultant, he or she will need to adhere to deadlines set by the school and by Dr Reynolds in order to ensure their applications are up to speed. If a student does not meet these deadlines, the school cannot be responsible for the quality of the student's application.

Additionally, if a student decides to apply to the US after OQ Exeat, the school will be happy to put through the relevant documents required for application, as long as the student provides these to Mrs Potter by [a certain time]. However, the student and family will be

responsible for arranging any necessary support: we would strongly recommend hiring an external consultant in this case.

Dr Reynolds is happy to meet with parents or students by appointment on the days she is in; to arrange a meeting or phone call, email her at usacollege@charterhouse.org.uk. To arrange support via UES, please email our office at info@ueseducation.com, or for consultancy enquiries contact simon@ueseducation.com.

General Timeline

[August-September], 1YS:

- Take UES SAT-ACT Diagnostic Test, sign up for the relevant test prep course at Charterhouse, and register for the December SAT or ACT.

The diagnostic test is available here:

<https://www.ueseducation.com/diagnostic>

Registration for the SAT internationally is available here:

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/international>

and for the ACT is available here: <http://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-non-us.html>

Spring, 1YS:

- Continue preparation for and re-take SAT (dates in March and May) or ACT (dates in February, April and June)
- Research college choices and create a long list of colleges
- Prepare for and take Subject Tests (May or June)

UES offers various assistance for students at this point in their test preparation:

- Week-long intensive courses in London: we particularly recommend these to students who decide to apply to the US in the spring, missing the Charterhouse preparation course [£750 (reduced from £990 for Charterhouse students)]
- Individual tuition via Skype, starting at £100ph
- Boot Camps in London, which are weekends focused on intensive test practice and technique. These are available on the weekends two weeks before each of the tests above [£495]
- Mock Tests in London, priced at £45 each, and available regularly throughout the year (see here: <https://www.ueseducation.com/mock-tests>)

June-July, 1YS:

- Approach two subject teachers to ask if they can provide references
- Notify housemaster of intention to apply to US, and ask to provide reference
- Reassess college list based on predicted grades + test performance
- Common Application and supplementary essay workshop at school
- Sign up for and enter crucial information into Common Application portal at Common App training day at school

Summer break, after 1YS:

- Finalise college list
- Write Common App and draft supplementary essays

For students not working with external consultants, we would recommend the US applications Boot Camp running at UES during the final week of August. Here, students will

get a head start on crucial aspects of their applications, including guidance on essays, activity lists, and college choices, as well as a personalised report outlining next steps, ensuring they are on track when their final year of school begins.

Autumn, 2YS:

Names of subject teacher references must be submitted to Mr Hazeldine	1 Oct
Questionnaires must be filled in and given to housemasters	1 Oct
Notify Careers office if applying Early	1 Oct
Early application submission deadline	1 Nov

Note Exact Dates 19 Oct – 3 Nov

Regular decision deadline (internal)	7 Nov
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must notify the Careers office of your intention to apply You must have created accounts in all relevant application portals and nominated careers@charterhouse.org.uk as counsellor You must provide the Careers office with relevant supporting documents, like transcripts You must ensure that your housemaster has emailed your reference to Careers 	

UC submission deadline	30 Nov
School closes	7 Dec
(the office cannot upload supplementary documents after this day)	
Early application notification	15 Dec
Regular decision submission deadline	1 Jan
Regular decision notification	April
Decision must be made	1 May

*Additional deadlines for students not using external consultants:

Early application supplementary essay drafts to LR for editing	1 Oct
Common App essays finalised	1 Oct
Early application deadline (internal)	1 Oct
UC essays to Dr Reynolds for review	1 Oct
Regular decision CA/supplementary essays to LR for review	15 Nov