Stellar World School
A Giant in the Making

Editor's Note

India's higher education system is entering a moment of quiet but profound transformation. For generations, the path to a "global" degree meant an overseas flight—often to the UK, the US, or Australia—accompanied by heavy financial planning and long periods of family separation. That long-standing pattern is now beginning to reverse. Instead of Indian students going abroad in large numbers, international universities are increasingly choosing to come here.

Over the past year, the Indian government has cleared close to fifteen foreign universities to establish campuses across the country. This shift gained visibility during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent engagements with the UK, where higher education featured as a strategic priority. The University of Southampton has already begun teaching students in Gurugram. The University of Liverpool is preparing to open in Bengaluru, while the University of York is setting its sights on Mumbai. Australia has moved early, with Deakin University and the University of Wollongong operating from Gujarat's GIFT City. Even the United States has joined the trend: Illinois Institute of Technology is expected to open a Mumbai campus by 2026. Italy's Istituto Europeo di Design is also planning an Indian presence, bringing globally recognised programs in fashion and design to local classrooms.

This momentum is not accidental. It is the result of the National Education Policy 2020, which represents the most ambitious rethink of Indian education in decades. At its core lies a pragmatic question: if more than a million Indian students are already studying abroad, exporting vast amounts of talent and capital each year, why shouldn't India host international-quality education on its own terms? To translate this idea into action, the University Grants Commission introduced new regulations in 2022 and 2023 that, for the first time, offered foreign universities real operational freedom. They can design curricula aligned with their home campuses, hire faculty from India and overseas, and set their own fee structures with minimal bureaucratic interference.

For global universities, India is an obvious destination. It offers the world's largest youth population, intense demand for high-quality degrees, and a cost structure that makes expansion viable at scale. Many institutions, particularly in the UK and Australia, are also under financial pressure at home, making international campuses an increasingly important source of stability and growth. For Indian families, the appeal is equally strong. Students can access globally recognised degrees at significantly lower costs, without navigating visa restrictions or the high living expenses of foreign cities.

Yet this shift also raises important questions. Will an international degree earned in India carry the same weight with employers as one earned abroad? Will elite foreign campuses widen existing inequalities? Or will competition push Indian universities to strengthen teaching, research, and global collaboration?

History adds an intriguing layer of irony. Nearly two centuries ago, Western education systems were imposed on India as instruments of colonial power. Today, those same systems are entering by invitation, under Indian regulation, competing for students rather than commanding them. The difference is not symbolic; it is structural.

This moment holds both risk and promise. If managed carefully, it could mark India's emergence as a regional education hub and a serious global academic player. And this time, the terms are being written in India's own hand.

Neeraj Mandhana
Founder & Editor-in-Chief
Aiyyo

Featured Content

STELLAR WORLD SCHOOL: A GIANT IN THE MAKING

Redefining IB Education in Mumbai with Personalised Guidance and Life Literacy

Harish Luharuka
Director of Academic
Stellar World School

In Mumbai's competitive and rapidly growing education landscape, Stellar World School is emerging as a fresh and ambitious choice for families seeking a thoughtful, future-ready academic environment. With new IB campuses in Bandra, Andheri and Goregaon, the school brings a clear vision focused on academic excellence, personal development and exceptional university preparation. Remarkably, in a short span of time, Stellar has become one of the fastest growing IB school brands in India, expanding swiftly while staying anchored to personalized attention and quality.

Stellar World School is built on the International Baccalaureate curriculum, known globally for its rigor and inquiry-driven learning. The school enhances this foundation with its Life Literacy framework, which develops financial understanding, digital fluency, emotional resilience and effective communication. The aim is simple: to prepare students not only for school, but for life.

This commitment to holistic and forward-looking education is reinforced by a powerful Board of Advisors. Renowned filmmaker and cultural leader Karan Johar, speaking about the school's approach to nurturing expression and personality, says: "What I admire about Stellar is that children are encouraged to find their own voice. Creativity is not an activity here; it is a way of thinking."

Sharing an educational viewpoint grounded in decades of experience, Mr. Amrishbhai Patel offers a broader reflection: "Education today must hold young people to high academic standards without losing sight of values." He then adds a thoughtful reminder: "Stellar's strength lies in developing both competence and character."

Stellar's hallmark strength lies in its university counselling program, which begins early and guides each student personally. International admissions expert Dr. Neeraj Mandhana captures the school's philosophy with a clear and assertive line: "Good guidance begins with understanding the child, not the checklist. Stellar's counselling model gives students the space to explore who they are before deciding where they want to go."

The school's vision is championed by Chairman Jesus Lall, whose leadership has driven the institution's rapid yet steady growth. He offers a confident statement: "Every child has potential waiting to be unlocked and schools must create the environment for that potential to rise, and that is our purpose at Stellar."

Stellar's campuses in Bandra, Andheri and Goregaon are designed with collaborative spaces, modern classrooms and safe, supportive environments. The school's grade-by-grade expansion ensures that faculty development, learning systems and student support structures grow with intention and stability. Strong safety standards and emotionally responsive environments help every child feel secure, confident and ready to explore. Families feel the impact of Stellar's personalised approach. A Stellar parent reflects softly on their own experience: "We realised our daughter wasn't just being taught; she was being understood. When teachers know a child's strengths, fears and dreams, the entire learning journey transforms."

What truly sets Stellar World School apart is the coherence of its mission. The IB curriculum, Life Literacy framework, advisory board insights, counselling systems and campus design all align with one purpose: to help students develop into confident, capable and globally prepared individuals. Stellar may be new, but it is already distinguishing itself as one of Mumbai's most promising IB institutions. For families seeking global academic standards, genuine personal attention and a clear pathway to university success, Stellar World School stands out as a thoughtful and future-ready choice.

SURVIVING COLLEGE APPLICATIONS IN THE AI ERA

Your Guide to Managing Authenticity, Credibility and Expectations in Modern Admissions

Matthew Jaskol
Co-founder
Pioneer Academics

Students across the world now use AI tools in some form. Many rely on these tools to brainstorm ideas, polish grammar, or draft entire paragraphs. Others use AI-generated text in homework or projects. Colleges know this. Admissions offices are rewriting their expectations, updating integrity rules and introducing AI detection systems. Some universities allow AI for brainstorming, others require full disclosure and several ban AI-generated text entirely.

This is why the current admissions cycle feels dramatically different. Students must navigate a landscape where authenticity, policy awareness and writing clarity matter more than ever.

The Changing Admissions Environment

The challenge is simple. How can students use AI tools without crossing ethical lines. And how can they submit work that still reflects original voice and personal depth. A review of policies from 22 institutions shows broad variation. However, several shared practices have emerged that can help students and counselors navigate the AI era.

Why AI-Generated Essays Matter

AI-generated writing tempts students who want clean and polished prose. Yet for colleges, it raises questions about integrity, fairness and whether the applicant's essays still reflect genuine thought and perspective. Some institutions view the use of large language models as an unfair advantage. Others believe that limited responsible use can level the playing field for students without strong writing support. Because colleges disagree, students must understand the risks of submitting AI-generated content.

1. Understand Every College's AI Policy

Policies are inconsistent and vary widely. Cornell allows AI for idea generation but not drafting or editing. Caltech permits grammar guidance but requires full disclosure. The Common Application, accepted by more than one thousand institutions, does not allow AI-generated text at all. Since misunderstanding a policy can harm an applicant, students must confirm guidelines for each institution on their list. Counselors can maintain updated trackers so students avoid unintentional violations.

2. Expect AI Detection

AI detection systems are now used in admissions offices. Tools like Turnitin's AI module can identify AI-generated text with increasing accuracy, although false positives and false negatives still occur. Vanderbilt has cautioned its officers not to rely entirely on detection results, but many colleges still combine these tools with manual checks. They may compare drafts, evaluate vocabulary usage or examine sentence structure to verify authenticity. The Pioneer Research Institute has used AI detection since 2023 and combines it with human evaluation to assess writing samples. Their three years of practice show that layered review works. Students should assume their essays will be screened and submit authentic work that can withstand scrutiny.

3. Strengthen a Graded Writing Sample

Several colleges now require graded papers as part of their evaluation. Princeton and Amherst are notable examples. This gives admissions readers a baseline sample of real writing done under classroom conditions without technological intervention. Students should treat upcoming assignments as potential application materials. Writing with depth, creativity and risk-taking allows these papers to stand out. Counselors can help students identify two or three strong pieces to refine for submission.

4. Build a Portfolio Beyond the Essay

Essays are no longer the only platform for demonstrating intellectual ability. Duke has reduced the emphasis placed on personal statements. Minerva encourages project-based portfolios. Pioneer Academics highlights research logs and mentorship-based work. Students can present projects, competitions, creative work or independent research as proof of persistence and originality. Counselors should help students archive reflections, drafts and notes so colleges can see development rather than a single polished artifact.

5. Maintain an Authentic Voice

Admissions officers consistently say that AI essays feel generic. At the Pioneer Co Curricular Summit, Justin Mohney of Carnegie Mellon emphasized that AI-dependent writing loses voice, authenticity and narrative presence. Students should practice informal writing styles through journal entries, reflections or personal narratives. Minor imperfections, natural phrasing and specific details all help differentiate human writing from AI-generated text. The goal is simple. Sound like yourself.

6. Choose Topics That Cannot Be Generated

AI can produce essays on common themes such as resilience, failure or hard work. These topics are easy to replicate and easy for admissions officers to overlook. Students should choose stories that only they can tell. Real experiences from family responsibilities, part time work, passion projects or mistakes in school clubs offer specificity that AI cannot convincingly imitate. Counselors can guide students toward unusual, personal or even risky topics that reveal growth. When the story is unmistakably individual, the writing becomes more defensible under AI scrutiny.

7. Strengthen Every Component of the Application

Essays are losing weight in several systems. Duke no longer assigns numeric scores to essays. UCAS will replace the traditional long statement with three short answer prompts in 2026. Several colleges are adding graded papers or timed responses.

Students must strengthen recommendation letters, activity descriptions and short responses. A detailed recommendation or a sustained extracurricular commitment may matter as much as a personal statement. Counselors can help students build coherence so every part of the application supports a single narrative.

8. Use AI as a Coach, Not a Writer

AI can support brainstorming, structural planning and grammar checks. It should not draft sentences. Brown allows light proofreading but may request a graded paper if the essay feels inconsistent. Caltech requires disclosure of any AI use. Students should be prepared to explain how AI assisted their writing if colleges ask. Transparency protects credibility.

The Edge That Still Matters

AI is reshaping admissions, but the central question remains unchanged. Colleges want to know the applicant. Essays, writing samples and portfolios are shifting, yet the priority is still clear and genuine self-representation. Students who stay proactive and authentic will adapt successfully. Counselors who provide clear strategy will help them avoid pitfalls and maintain integrity. In the AI era, personal voice is not disappearing. It is simply becoming more important.

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SCHOOL COUNSELLOR OF THE MONTH

Laveena Mathur

Career Counselor
Pathways World School

Every great student journey has a quiet hero behind it, someone who listens, guides, reassures, and helps young people discover the paths meant for them. This section celebrates such champions of guidance, whose insight and dedication shape countless futures. This month, we spotlight Laveena Mathur, an education professional who believes in standing with her students as they choose their right path, offering the support, clarity and encouragement they need to move forward with confidence. For her, teaching is more than a job, it is a way to give students confidence, help them grow, and make a real difference in their lives. Her thoughtful approach, humour, and heartfelt wisdom reveal what truly makes a counsellor unforgettable.

1. What's the weirdest/funniest thing you ever heard a student or parent say?
A student once asked me, Ma'am, is there a college where I never have to wake up early. I laughed and said, If you find one, tell me too, I'll go there with you.

2. If you had to write a college essay about yourself, what would your topic be?
I would write about myself growing into my role while helping others grow. As my journey started from a small town as a coordinator at HCL Infosystems Ltd. to becoming a Career Counselor at Pathways World School, Gurgaon has taught me how small steps, persistence, and empathy can matter in once's life. I never planned this career path, but it slowly became the place where I feel the most fulfilled.

3. What's the most oddly satisfying part of your job that no one ever thinks about?
When a student who once avoided my emails finally walks into my office on their own and asks a question. It feels like a small personal victory every time.

4. What would your "Guidance Counselor Superpower" be if you were in a comic book?
If I were in a comic book, the ability to read a student's mind right before they say, "Ma'am, I'm confused." It would save so much time and so many meetings.

5. Which fictional character do you think would make a surprisingly great guidance counselor?
Relating the fictional character from Start Wars Movie, Yoda, small, calm, wise, speaks little but says everything. His way of delivering reality checks is unmatched.

6. What's your go-to motivational phrase that even you roll your eyes at sometimes—but it works?
Take one step at a time, at the first instance it will sound basic, but in long run whenever a student feels overwhelmed, saying this somehow resets their entire mindset. It gently reminds them that they don't have to solve everything at once, just focus on the next small, durable step.

DUKE KUNSHAN UNIVERSITY: A CLOSE LOOK AT CHINA'S MOST AMBITIOUS GLOBAL LIBERAL ARTS INSTITUTION

What Indian Applicants Need to Know About DKU's Opportunities and Realities

DK
Head of Communications
NM Squad

Duke Kunshan University is a joint institution created by Duke University in the United States and Wuhan University in China. It opened in 2013 with the intention of building a globally networked liberal arts model inside China. The campus spans 200 acres in Kunshan, Jiangsu Province, located between Suzhou and Shanghai. High-frequency trains place both cities within 30 minutes away. The campus functions as a self-contained academic town with fully digital systems. Students rarely use cash or cards anywhere within the university. Shanghai Hongqiao Airport is about 37 kilometres away, while Shanghai Pudong International Airport is roughly 70 kilometres from campus. The climate resembles Kolkata, with summer temperatures around 31 to 33 degrees Celsius and winter averages near 6 to 8 degrees Celsius.

Admissions Realities and the Indian Applicant Landscape

Duke Kunshan follows the holistic structure of Duke University but evaluates applications independently. Students may apply through the Common Application or directly through the Duke Kunshan portal. The university receives approximately 10,000 to 12,000 undergraduate applications each year. From this pool, it builds an entering class of around 600 students. The intake usually consists of about 350 Chinese students and about 250 international students. This results in an acceptance rate that ranges from 5 to 7 percent.

For Indian applicants, Duke Kunshan remains significantly underexplored. Every year, about 25 to 30 Indian applicants receive offers, yet only a small number enroll. The low conversion rate stems mainly from a lack of awareness instead of lack of interest. Students from Pakistan and Bangladesh currently appear in higher proportions. This makes the present moment unusually favourable for qualified Indian applicants seeking an academically rigorous institution with a Duke connection and considerably lower overall cost.

Interviews are not automatically offered to every applicant. Shortlisted candidates, especially those considered for large scholarships, may be invited for an online conversational interview. These interviews focus on global awareness, intellectual maturity and the applicant's reasoning for choosing a transnational university model.

DKU's Academic Model

Duke Kunshan uses a seven-week modular system. Students take 2 courses per module and complete 8 modules per academic year. This creates a fast-paced and intensive environment. Class sizes are extremely small, usually between 8 and 10 students, which allows for personalized faculty mentorship. All students complete 2 years of mandatory Chinese language instruction. By the end of the second year, most students reach functional conversational proficiency. This requirement is considered a professional advantage, since many internships and early career roles in China expect basic Mandarin literacy.

Majors are declared in the fifth semester. Every student completes three Common Core courses that address global challenges, ethical reasoning and cross-cultural analysis. Degree requirements total 136 Duke Kunshan credits, equal to 34 Duke University credits. Each major requires between 16 and 19 courses. The Signature Work Project serves as the culminating requirement and may take the form of research, a senior thesis or an applied creative project.

The curriculum is structured across three divisions. Natural and Applied Sciences is the most research-intensive and includes Computer Science, Data Science and Materials Science. Computer Science attracts about one third of international students and emphasizes algorithmic design, machine learning and systems programming. Data Science blends statistical modelling, econometrics and programming for analytics or quantitative finance pathways. Materials Science offers concentrations in Chemistry or Physics and provides access to energy systems and electrochemical research. Students frequently work with 3D carbon fibre printers, microscopy labs and partner institutions such as Shanghai Jiao Tong University.

The Social Sciences division includes Global Health, Economics, Political Science and Quantitative Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Global Health incorporates epidemiology, analytics and public health management with field observations in Chinese healthcare settings. Economics focuses on econometric modelling and macroeconomic analysis. QPPE is the newest program and attracts students who prefer mathematically grounded policy work.

The Arts and Humanities division includes Media and Arts, Ethics and Leadership and Behavioral Science. Media and Arts merges filmmaking, computational design and digital storytelling. Behavioral Science combines cognitive psychology, neuroscience and applied research for fields such as behavioural data analysis and marketing intelligence.

Campus Culture and Student Life
The student population includes about 50 percent American students, with the remaining cohort drawn from Europe, Africa and Asia. Integration between Chinese and international students remains limited, often estimated at around 20 percent. Mixed roommate assignments in the first year support some cultural exchange. Social life is academically oriented and built around clubs, discussion groups, events and weekend travel rather than nightlife.

Campus facilities are secure and modern. Students generally stay in double rooms with ensuite bathrooms. Housing costs are approximately 7,500 Chinese yuan per term. Food options include Chinese and continental choices. Vegetarian students may need to rely on communal kitchens or food delivery services due to limited fully vegetarian dining hall options. Proximity to Shanghai provides access to Indian cuisine and other global food choices.

Career Pathways and Graduate Outcomes
Graduate outcomes are emerging but strong. Since the first undergraduate class graduated in 2022, about 80 to 90 percent of graduates have moved directly into postgraduate study at institutions such as Duke, Columbia, Oxford and the London School of Economics. About 5 to 10 percent enter full-time roles in consulting, technology or finance in China, Hong Kong or Singapore. Employers include HSBC, Deloitte, ByteDance, Huawei and Tesla China. On-campus positions such as Resident Advisor roles and assistantships provide stipends that reduce living costs further.

Duke Kunshan's dual degree structure and Duke affiliation support postgraduate applications and international mobility. For Indian students who want a highly personalized, globally structured education with strong research access, the university currently offers a combination of low applicant saturation and high academic return.

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INVESTIN EXPANDS CAREER EXPLORATION INTO THE PRE-TEEN YEARS

What Counselors Should Take Away from This Shift and How It Should Influence Practice

Richard Lawless
International Partnerships Manager
InvestIN

Across schools, counselors repeatedly encounter a predictable pattern: students arrive in Grades 10 to 12 with narrow ideas about careers, shaped more by familiarity than informed exploration. By that stage, many have already ruled out paths they barely understand. The data mirrors this experience. 39% of teenagers report having no clear sense of their future direction, and 40–52% of graduates regret their degree choice. These are not small margins; they point to a structural problem in how young people are introduced to the world of work.

It is in this context that InvestIN has announced its Career Discovery Summer Experience, a programme designed specifically for 12–14-year-olds and launching in July 2026. While it may appear as just another summer course, counselors should view it differently. The move signals a shift in when and how career learning must begin.

Why Counselors Should Pay Attention

The argument for earlier career exploration is backed by multiple indicators:

- 93% of parents believe schools should embed career-related learning into regular instruction.
- 80% of employers report that graduates lack essential workplace competencies despite strong academics.
- Students exposed to structured career learning between ages 15–18 show measurable long-term earnings advantages.
- When exposure begins earlier, between ages 12–14, gains in motivation, clarity, and academic engagement are significantly stronger.

The takeaway is unambiguous: students benefit from career exploration long before the traditional counseling timeline. Waiting until senior grades compresses guidance into decision-making rather than discovery.

What InvestIN's Expansion Reflects on Student Development

The Career Discovery Summer Experience is built around exposure rather than specialization, a critical distinction. At ages 12–14, the goal is not to steer students toward a field but to broaden their perception of what exists.

The programme uses structures that align with developmental needs:

- A 15-day residential format that sustains engagement.
- 50 hours of industry-led instruction, calibrated for younger learners.
- Morning lessons introducing professional concepts and industry vocabulary.
- Afternoon sessions using hands-on simulations (tools, scenarios, role-play).
- Deliberate development of teamwork, communication, and problem-solving.
- 2 full-day excursions, including exposure to UCL and a cultural learning day.
- A concluding graduation ceremony to consolidate learning.

Counselors should not treat these as programme features. They are cues: this is the type of structure that effectively supports early exploration. The focus is breadth, cognitive stimulation, and context, not premature decision-making.

How This Fits into Long-Term Career Readiness

InvestIN's internal developmental model, the InvestIN Learning Pathway, splits career learning into four stages:

1. Career Immersion: Exposure to real tasks and environments.
2. Academic Integration: Connecting school subjects with their real-world relevance.
3. Career Readiness: Building communication, collaboration, and resilience.
4. Future Advantage: Deeper specialization and long-term planning.

Most schools unintentionally begin at stage 3. Counselors get involved when applications become urgent, subject selections are due, or students must articulate motivations. By that time, identity formation is already underway. What the new InvestIN launch demonstrates is the value of beginning stage 1 early, before assumptions settle and before fear of the unfamiliar restricts imagination. This has direct implications for how counselors structure their own work.

What Counselors Should Take from This

This development is meaningful only if it informs practice. For counselors, there are five actionable adjustments.

1. Start Guidance in Middle School: Introduce interest mapping, exposure frameworks, and reflective exercises in Grades 6–8. Early adolescence is when curiosity peaks and career stereotypes begin to form.

2. Embed Career Relevance Into Academic Subjects: Work with teachers to highlight intersections such as math with data science, economics, architecture, or biology with biotechnology and public health. Students engage more deeply when they understand the application.

3. Replace One-Off Career Days With Sustained Structures: Short events rarely shift identity. Use progression models like providing exposure, fostering exploration, promoting skill-building, and emphasising reflection.

4. Use External Programmes Strategically: Programmes like InvestIN's are valuable when framed as part of a continuum, not as standalone experiences. They can fill exposure gaps counselors cannot always cover within school hours.

5. Track Curiosity, Not Just Achievement: Maintain longitudinal notes on interests, questions, patterns, and emerging strengths. These indicators are far more predictive of future fit than grades alone.

The Broader Implication for Counselors

Traditional counseling frameworks operate reactively. Students identify goals late, seek help late, and make decisions under pressure. But the data and developmental evidence point to a different model, one that begins early, expands possibilities, and reframes guidance as cultural rather than procedural.

InvestIN's expansion into the 12–14 cohort should be read as a sign of where educational systems must move. Early exploration does not accelerate decision-making; it prevents premature closure. It gives students the language, context, and confidence to eventually choose with intention rather than habit.

For counselors, this is not a shift in role but a shift in timing and strategy. The responsibility remains the same: helping students see more than they currently do. The difference is that the work must begin earlier, long before the application clock starts ticking.
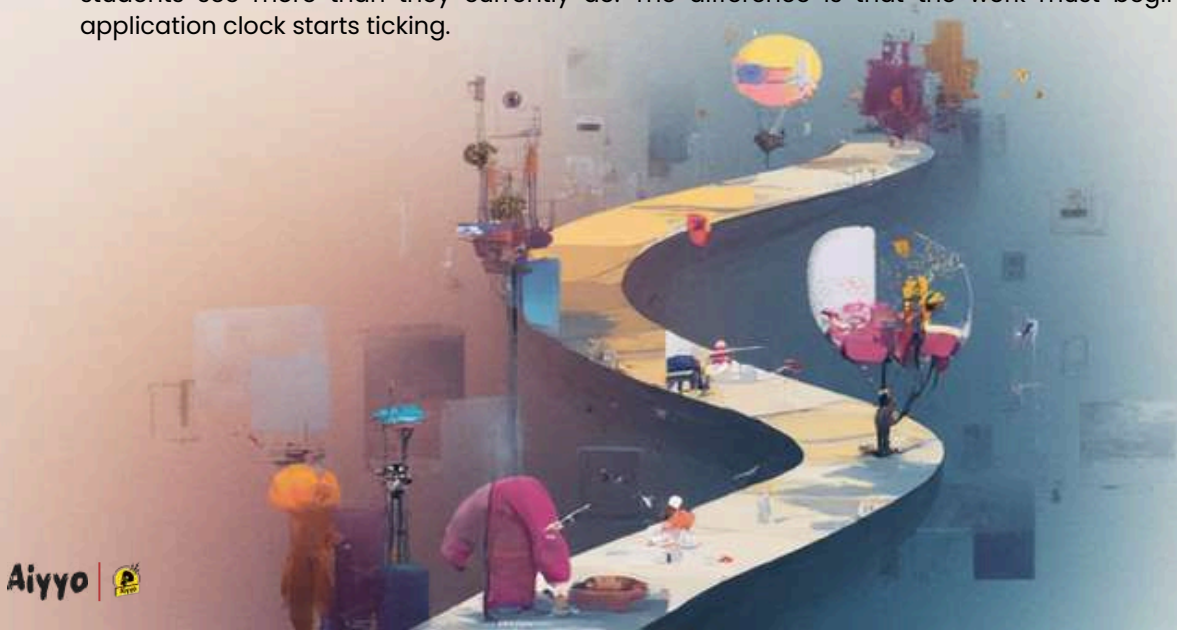
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WORKING WITH IECS: THE COLLEGE ADMISSION ACCOUNTABILITY PARENTS BUY

The Real Reason Why Families Choose Independent Education Consultants

Neeraj Mandhana
Founder
Aiyyo

If you ask any parent in India why they hired an independent education consultant, their answers usually orbit around a predictable constellation of reasons: clarity, expertise, strategy, structure. But underneath these polite, brochure-friendly explanations lies the real motivation. Parents hire us for accountability. Not because they think their child lacks talent or intellect, but because they know their child's true superpower is a heroic level of procrastination.

Parents recognise behavioural patterns in a way no consultant ever can. They know that if Aarav says he will "start the Common App tonight," he really means "sometime between Diwali and the next Ice Age." They know that if Myra claims she has her UC PIQs fully outlined, her definition of "outlined" might simply be a Google Doc title and a blinking cursor. And they know that the moment they ask, "Beta, did you finish your essay," a domestic cold war will erupt.

This is why they buy us. To avoid these nightly conflicts. To outsource the nagging. To ensure that someone, anyone, can compel their child to write something that resembles a draft before the deadlines turn carnivorous. Yet here is the uncomfortable truth. What happens when the student still does not follow through? When Aarav skips three consecutive sessions, each time with a fresh excuse involving school events, group projects or stray dogs outside the gate. When Myra repeatedly asks for "just one more day" to send her portfolio file, even though we all know that this mythical day does not exist. When a student promises to finish their Activity List by Sunday but arrives on Monday morning claiming that "the weekend was too short." At that moment, one of the central expectations parents had when they hired us quietly collapses. Even if your contract is crystal clear and legally airtight, you still might not have delivered what they believed they were buying.

The breakdown usually happens because we confuse accountability with reminders. A reminder is a ping. Accountability is a system. Teenagers do not respond to adult logic. They respond to structure, predictability, mild discomfort and the fear that someone will actually check what they did. Case in point. When I introduced a weekly ritual for a student named Raghav where he had to submit a Monday work plan and a Friday progress note, his productivity mysteriously doubled. His mother thought divine intervention was responsible. In reality, it was simply the fact that he knew someone was watching. Another example. When I explained to Tara that a missed draft deadline meant her revision slot would shift to the following week, she treated deadlines like fragile museum artefacts. Not because she suddenly adored writing essays, but because she finally felt the cost of delay. Systems like these help deliver what parents imagine they are purchasing. They also prevent the dreaded moment when a parent says, "We thought she was on track" while you smile politely and try not to reveal that she has ignored your last seven messages.

Parents do not just buy expertise. They buy follow-through. They buy momentum. They buy the illusion, and hopefully the reality, that someone can help their child cross the finish line without emotional warfare erupting at home.

Accountability is not an accessory in our profession. It is the quiet engine that carries the entire college application process. And when it works, both students and parents feel that they received exactly what they hoped for when they chose us.

Here are five practical, proven accountability systems an IEC can build into their practice. Each one is simple to implement but dramatically improves student follow-through.

M-F Rhythm
A powerful accountability system for IECs is the Monday to Friday work rhythm. Students begin each week by submitting a Monday Work Plan that outlines exactly what they intend to complete, and end the week with a Friday Progress Note that reports what they actually accomplished. This predictable cycle encourages self-reflection, reduces excuses and helps both students and parents see tangible movement every single week.

Micro-Deadlines
Another effective structure is the use of micro-deadlines paired with scheduled review slots. Instead of asking a student to finish an entire essay by a single date, the work is broken into smaller milestones like brainstorming, outlining and drafting. Each micro-deadline is connected to a pre-booked session. If the task is not completed on time, the revision slot automatically shifts to the next available date, introducing natural consequences without confrontation.

Tracker Dashboard
A shared tracker ritual can also dramatically improve student follow-through. The consultant creates a centralised dashboard in Google Sheets, Notion or Trello that lists every essay, supplement, form and deadline. Students are responsible for updating their progress after every work block. This visibility eliminates confusion, prevents last-minute panics and gives parents a real-time snapshot of momentum.

Three Strikes
The three strike response system offers a calm yet firm approach to repeated cancellations or missed sessions. Each time a student fails to attend or reschedules without valid reason, it counts as a strike. When the student reaches three strikes, the consultant initiates a structured parent update followed by a joint meeting to reset expectations and address the pattern. This method communicates seriousness while maintaining professionalism and fairness.

The SAC - The Sunday Accountability Check-in
The Sunday accountability check-in is another simple but powerful routine. Every Sunday, the consultant sends a short form asking students to list their upcoming goals, identify approaching deadlines and commit to the tasks they plan to complete before the next session. By starting the week with intention rather than avoidance, students become more organised and take greater ownership of the application process.

Neha Pandit

Founder
We-Learn

In this section, Aiyyo brings you insights from counseling trailblazers who have made a significant impact with their work. Through candid interviews, we explore their journeys, passions, and personal philosophies. This month, we sit down with Neha Pandit, the Founder of We-Learn, to uncover what drives her success, how she balances the demands of work and life, and the mantra that keeps her moving forward.

What was your college degree?
Metal craft specialisation in BFA

Your Favorite Book
What I Know For Sure by Oprah winfrey

Your Comfort Food
Sev Puri

A School/College you really enjoyed visiting
Pathways Gurgaon and UID Ahmedabad especially meaningful to me as an artist

What's on top of your bucket list?
An Alaska cruise

One thing you would most like to change about the world
Take basic civic sense more seriously

If you could give one piece of advice to your high school self, what would it be?
Go on more school trips

What inspired you to do what you do?
Living each day differently, staying creative, and working closely with young people
'

A secret to balancing work & life
Take each day as it comes and set clear priorities

Your Life Mantra
Early to rise, early to bed

EXPLORING CREATIVE CAREERS IN THE WORLD OF WEDDINGS

Where Art Meets Celebration at We-Learn

Neha Pandit
Founder
We-Learn

At We-Learn, we often remind our students that art lives everywhere. It lives in the rituals we repeat, the culture we inherit, the colours we celebrate with, and especially in the world of Indian weddings. A wedding is not just a ceremony. It is an experience. It is a living canvas shaped by design, craft, sound, movement, and intention. Behind every moment is an artist who understands how to transform emotion into structure.

As the wedding season approaches, we want young creators to view weddings not simply as events, but as professional ecosystems filled with specialised opportunities. Whether someone loves textiles, interiors, makeup, photography, strategy, choreography, or visual direction, the wedding industry welcomes technical thinkers as much as creative dreamers.

Designing Worlds from Everyday Spaces

Before décor arrives, a wedding venue is just an empty structure. It is the set designer who gives it meaning. This role goes far beyond choosing attractive colours. Set designers work with spatial planning, construction techniques, material behaviour, installation safety, and vendor coordination. They understand how scale influences emotion, how natural and artificial light interact with textures, and how crowd flow affects comfort and atmosphere.

Students who enjoy architecture, interiors, or visual storytelling often realise that wedding set design is rigorously technical. Lighting specialists layer illumination to create depth, focus, and mood. Floral designers apply structural principles so their installations can withstand heat, wind, and long hours. Art directors ensure every visual element across lounges, stages, mandaps, and photo zones follows a coherent visual language. Together, these professionals do far more than decorate. They construct an experience and engineer ambience.

Fashion at the Heart of Celebration

Weddings are where fashion becomes a cultural memory. Bridal and festive wear demands a unique blend of pattern engineering, textile research, craftsmanship, and emotional storytelling. It is one of the most technically intensive areas of design. Kaveeya, one of our students, designed a cobalt blue lehenga for her portfolio. Her process reflected depth and discipline. She draped muslin prototypes to test flare ratios and studied the evolution of lehenga construction from traditional silhouettes to modern circular patterns. She analysed fabric weights to understand how different materials influence movement on stage and on camera. Her digital illustrations mapped embroidery placements, calculated motif scale, and visualised how repeated patterns would translate on curved surfaces. Through this project she discovered that careers in wedding fashion require precision, cultural understanding, and problem solving. This world opens pathways in couture development, textile innovation, festive wear design, styling, and creative direction for wedding campaigns.

Luxury, Branding, and Identity

Weddings today are shaped significantly by branding and strategic identity. Every designer label, décor house, beauty studio, invitation artist, and hospitality team functions like a brand with its own voice and market position. Students who enjoy communication, marketing, or strategy often find deep intellectual challenges here.

Palak, a student pursuing Luxury Brand Management, conducted a detailed study on the label Papa Don't Preach by Shubhika. Her work explored brand equity, target audience segmentation, craft cluster engagement, supply chain decisions, and the economics of couture. She examined how the brand uses unconventional palettes, distinctive surface techniques, and community engagement to build recognition. She also studied their visual language across platforms and how consistent storytelling strengthens luxury perception. Her conclusion was clear. Wedding brands succeed when their identity is not decorative but strategic.

This opens doors to careers in luxury communication, brand strategy, merchandising, consumer behaviour research, and trend analysis.

Beauty, Mood, and Expression

Wedding beauty professionals work with a high level of technical expertise. Makeup artists study undertones, skin preparation methods, application techniques for different lighting conditions, and the chemistry of long-wear products. Hairstylists understand structure, proportion, and the engineering behind secure styling. Henna artists use concepts of symmetry, negative space, and pressure control. Accessory designers test materials and fastening techniques to ensure comfort over long hours. Students who enjoy portrait work, styling, or detailed craftsmanship often find these careers deeply rewarding because they balance artistic intuition with technical discipline.

Choreographers at weddings are creators of performance, not just instructors. They analyse stage dimensions, costume limitations, and emotional beats. They design transitions between acts and coordinate rehearsals with families of all age groups and skill levels. Sound designers shape the mood of the event through acoustics, equipment mapping, ambient layering, and live mixing. They ensure that energy is felt consistently across large spaces with varying sound conditions. Their work influences how every moment is experienced.

Movement and Music

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Photography and Filmmaking

Wedding photographers and filmmakers operate with a high degree of precision. They study dynamic lighting, composition rules, colour management, and behavioural cues to anticipate emotions. They make technical decisions about lenses, shutter speeds, and editing styles to create compelling narratives. Their films and photographs become emotional archives for generations. For students who enjoy visual storytelling, this field offers immense opportunity in photojournalism, cinematic direction, drone filming, and post-production artistry.

A Universe of Creative Careers

The wedding industry is a sophisticated network of specialised creative professions. Bridal fashion, textile development, accessory design, styling, luxury strategy, set design, lighting design, floral engineering, visual direction, choreography, sound design, photography, filmmaking, henna artistry, invitation design, gifting design, hospitality design, culinary artistry, and content creation all work together to shape the emotional experience of a wedding. At We-Learn, we want students to recognise weddings not as simple celebrations but as expansive creative worlds. Weddings will always need specialists. Specialists will always redefine memory, beauty, and culture. In the world of weddings, art does not decorate the celebration. Art defines it.

THE COMMUNITY ESSAY: WRITING ABOUT BELONGING AND CONTRIBUTION

**By
Bhupender Bhardwaj
NM Squad**

Every student-applicant carries quiet worlds within them. These worlds are shaped by routines at home, responsibilities taken on without being asked, and the small relationships that teach cooperation, comfort, and conflict. Community essays ask you to open those worlds. They want to understand how you connect with others and how you help shape the spaces you join.

Admissions officers read these essays and look for reciprocity, perspective, and a willingness to strengthen a community, whether or not you have ever held a title.

1. Belonging as a Lived Experience, Not a Claim

Community is something you participate in, not something you declare. When Northwestern asks, "Community and belonging matter at Northwestern. Tell us about one or more communities, networks, or student groups you see yourself connecting with on campus," the question is really about the dynamics of belonging.

Robust responses highlight lived interaction. One student described how a Dras sector army soldier shared measured accounts of carrying avalanche-stranded villagers through waist-deep snow. His steady manner shaped the student's understanding of courage. Inspired, he began organizing building-wide emergency preparedness activities for younger residents, including mock fire drills, basic first aid sessions, and small medical camps. Over time, the housing complex developed a reliable safety routine. Community often begins with someone who models a new form of responsibility.

2. Contribution as Participation, Not Performance

MIT asks, "Describe one way you have collaborated with others to learn from them, with them, or contribute to your community together." This prompt focuses on how you function within a group. Collaboration often shows itself through small but consistent actions.

A girl noticed that new multilingual classmates ate lunch alone. She created a weekly conversation table where students exchanged idioms from their languages, such as "the early bird catches the worm" and "a drop in the ocean." Shared laughter over translation mishaps helped reduce isolation. Another student introduced his robotics team to the idiom "many hands make light work," which became a motivational cue during late testing sessions. These gestures strengthened group cohesion and revealed a natural instinct for community building.

3. Perspective as an Instrument for Inclusion

Perception works at a subtle level. Penn's prompt, "How will you explore community at Penn? Consider how Penn will help shape your perspective, and how your experiences and perspective will help shape Penn," seeks perceptual acuity. What do you notice that others might overlook, and how does that shape your contribution?

A student whose parents ran a medium-sized grocery store wrote about recognizing signs of financial strain in her peers. When she saw classmates skipping field trips because of fees, she worked with a counselor to create a quiet subsidy process through the PTA. Her perspective came from years of watching her parents stretch limited resources for customers.

4. Authenticity and Honest Reflection

Community essays become strongest when students reflect honestly. A student once wrote, "I sat alone during lunch for months because I did not know how to join groups. Now I am the person who notices the student sitting alone." This line carried emotional intelligence and growth.

Another amateur photographer admitted that he spent years shooting landscapes in isolation, experimenting with aperture bracketing, long-exposure trails, and dynamic range coherence, but was too shy to share his work. After finally showing a series of his edited files to classmates, he created a small landscape photography club that met on weekends for composition walks, exposure workshops, and post-processing sessions. The club evolved into a safe space for introverted students who preferred quiet, creative pursuits.

5. Bringing Your Story to Life

At the heart of every such essay lie two essential questions. Where do you experience belonging, and how do you help others feel it as well. Colleges want to picture the version of you who engages fully in shared spaces, diffuses tension with empathy, initiates conversation when it matters, and offers reliable support when a group needs steadiness.

In crafting these essays, you help admissions officers imagine not only who you are today, but the community member you are prepared to become.

PPE: THE HOT MAJOR EVERYONE IS TALKING ABOUT

Why Philosophy, Politics and Economics Has Become Today's Breakout Degree

Ravisha Maheshwari
Senior Editor
Aiyyo

Few undergraduate programs have seen their popularity rise as quickly, or as globally as Philosophy, Politics and Economics. What started at Oxford in the 1920s has steadily grown into one of the most recognisable interdisciplinary degrees in the world. Today, more than 150 universities offer PPE or a close variant, and interest keeps rising.

From Oxford's Imperial Roots to a Modern Trend

PPE wasn't created as a fashionable major. Oxford originally designed it to educate future administrators who were more attuned to the modern world than to a narrow focus on classics. That history still shapes how some people see it. But the political footprint of PPE graduates is real. As The Oxford Student reported, Oxford's PPE alumni include:

- 4 Pakistani PMs and 1 President
- 3 PMs of Australia
- Political leaders in Myanmar, Ghana, Peru and Thailand

And in the UK, the influence is unmistakable. In the 2014 General Election, voters were essentially choosing between a PPE graduate from Brasenose and a PPE graduate from Corpus Christi.

Still, PPE is no longer just an Oxford pipeline for future PMs. Oxford now has more than 600 students enrolled in PPE, and nearly 40 UK universities offer versions of it. The degree is now taught in about 20 Commonwealth universities, is well established in African, Indian and Asian universities, and has grown rapidly in the U.S., where over 75 universities, from Adelphi to Yale, offer similar programs.

A Cure for Early Specialisation?

One reason PPE is booming is that it pushes back against early academic narrowing. As David Willetts pointed out, PPE thrives because a problem of English education is too much specialisation too soon. PPE offers structure, but also flexibility, something students increasingly want. Many universities have expanded PPE into PPEL or PPL, weaving law into the mix without the full commitment of a law degree. These variations appeal to students interested in public life, policy or governance who want time before specialising.

That said, not all PPE programs function the same way. Students need to look beyond the name and understand how strongly the three fields are integrated, what kinds of assignments or research are required, and how the curriculum is structured year by year.

Prestige Meets Purpose

A major reason PPE resonates with today's teenagers is that it fits a very specific tension. Students worry that a traditional liberal arts degree might feel disconnected from real careers, yet they're not ready to choose a specialised path at 18. PPE sits in the middle. It offers academic depth but also clear relevance.

Yale's version, Ethics, Politics and Economics, describes the degree as offering analytic rigor, enduring normative questions, and an integrative and critical understanding of institutions and policies. In simpler terms, students learn how societies function, where systems fail and how decisions are shaped, skills that translate into many fields, from government to finance to consulting.

It's no surprise, then, that interdisciplinary degrees in the social sciences are booming. They match the way young people want to study: rigorous, connected to current issues and open-ended enough to support different career paths.

Admissions: Different Schools, Different Expectations

Because PPE varies widely, so do the entry requirements.

At Manchester, admissions are flexible. Students can offer quite a number of different A-level subjects, and IB students may present Standard Level Mathematics.

At the other end of the spectrum is the London School of Economics and Political Science, whose PPE is a four-year program giving equal weight to all three subjects. Here, philosophy includes formal logic, and economics is highly quantitative. As a result, LSE requires an A* in Maths for A-level applicants and 7 in Higher Level Mathematics for IB students.

In the U.S., because most universities do not admit by major, PPE applicants follow standard admission expectations, except for highly selective programs that cap majors or require internal applications. Yale once admitted students to its highly selective EPE major only after enrollment but now offers direct admission, showing how demand has outgrown prior structures.

What Students Should Actually Check Before Choosing PPE
The big advantage of PPE, flexibility, can also make it hard to evaluate. Students should:

- Study the year-by-year course plan rather than relying on the major's name
- Examine whether the three fields are meaningfully integrated
- Consult syllabi to understand what "philosophy" or "economics" actually means in that programme
- Review research expectations, capstones and interdisciplinary work

For instance, at the LSE, students present independent research at a conference, and the strongest work appears in Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Publications like these offer a direct window into the programme's academic culture.

Why PPE Is the Major of This Moment
PPE has momentum because it fits the needs of a rapidly changing world. It trains students to think across systems, not inside silos. It gives them grounding in ethics, power, markets and decision-making, all essential for leadership across sectors. It prepares students not just to understand the world, but to participate in it with perspective and intellectual range.

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SOUND EDITING: THE GROWING CAREER OF THE FUTURE

The Expanding World of Audio Careers in Film, OTT, and Gaming

Eldho Abraham
Audio Engineer and Music Producer

In the age of digital entertainment, where Over-The-Top (OTT) platforms dominate our screens and regional, mainstream, and indie cinema thrive like never before, the demand for high-quality audiovisual experiences has surged. At the heart of these experiences is an often underappreciated art: sound editing. Once viewed as a niche technical job, sound editing has transformed into a vital, creative career with immense growth potential in the modern content landscape.

The Backbone of the Audiovisual Experience

Sound editing encompasses the process of selecting and assembling sound recordings to create the final soundtrack of a film, series, commercial, or digital content. This includes dialogue, background noise, sound effects, and sometimes even music. Sound editors work closely with directors, sound designers, composers, and mixers to bring a story to life with auditory precision.

With the rise in high-definition formats and immersive audio technologies like Dolby Atmos, audiences have become more discerning. Viewers no longer just watch content, they experience it. That immersive experience hinges as much on what they hear as what they see. As a result, skilled sound editors are becoming indispensable.

Boom of OTT and Regional Content

The OTT boom has created an unprecedented demand for content, spawning original films, web series, documentaries, and shorts across every genre imaginable. Global giants like Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ Hotstar, along with regional players like Aha, SonyLIV, and Hoichoi, are continuously investing in new content.

This surge has unlocked opportunities for stories in regional languages and independent cinema, which often operate outside the big studio system. These projects might not have million-dollar budgets, but they strive for professional sound quality to compete in global markets. This democratization of content has paved the way for fresh talent in sound editing to work on a diverse array of projects, from Tamil indie films to gritty Marathi thrillers to Hindi-language web dramas.

From Technical Role to Creative Craft

Traditionally seen as a post-production technical function, sound editing has evolved into a deeply creative craft. Editors must not only ensure technical accuracy but also enhance the emotional and narrative impact of a story. A well-placed silence, a subtle ambient noise, or the manipulation of voice and echo can change the tone of a scene completely.

For instance, a tense thriller might use minimalist sound editing to build suspense, while a fantasy series may require layered soundscapes to create otherworldly realms. Editors today need to possess both artistic sensibility and technical mastery, making the role intellectually stimulating and creatively satisfying.

Skill Set and Training

Sound editing is a specialized skill that combines knowledge of audio software with a deep understanding of storytelling. Popular tools include Avid Pro Tools, Adobe Audition, Logic Pro X, and Steinberg Nuendo. Editors are expected to understand sound theory, acoustics, and the psychology of sound in storytelling.

Aspiring sound editors can pursue formal education in sound design, film production, or audio engineering. Numerous institutes across India and the globe offer diploma and degree programs, such as the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI), and Whistling Woods International.

Equally important is practical experience. Internships, collaborations on student films, and freelancing offer the hands-on exposure necessary to hone one's skills and build a strong portfolio.

Career Prospects and Salaries

Sound editing careers span a wide range of industries: film and TV production houses, advertising agencies, animation studios, video game development, music production, and online content platforms. With digital content production growing exponentially, the job market for sound editors is expanding accordingly.

Entry-level salaries for sound editors in India typically range from ₹3 to ₹5 lakhs per annum, depending on the employer and city. With experience and a strong portfolio, professionals can earn ₹10 to ₹20 lakhs annually or even more, especially when working on international projects or in freelance capacities with multiple clients.

The international market is equally promising. Hollywood productions, global video games, and international OTT content frequently hire remote sound editors from across the world, offering lucrative packages and cross-cultural collaboration opportunities.

Freelancing and Remote Work

Sound editing is particularly well-suited for freelancing. With the right hardware and software setup, editors can work remotely with clients across the globe. Platforms like Upwork, Fiverr, and Mandy.com offer avenues for freelancers to connect with content creators and production houses.

Freelancing provides creative freedom, flexible working hours, and the potential to build a diverse portfolio. However, it also demands self-discipline, strong networking skills, and continuous upskilling to stay relevant in a competitive market.

Future Outlook

As more people consume content across screens—smartphones, tablets, VR headsets, and home theatres—the importance of quality sound will only grow. Emerging formats like interactive storytelling, AR/VR content, and spatial audio experiences are pushing the boundaries of sound editing further.

Artificial Intelligence and machine learning are beginning to influence post-production workflows, but creative sound editing remains a human-centric discipline. Technology may assist, but the ear and intuition of a skilled sound editor will always be in demand.

Conclusion

Sound editing is no longer just a backstage job; it's a front-row seat to storytelling. With the proliferation of content platforms, regional storytelling, and technological innovation, this field offers dynamic opportunities for creative professionals.

For those with a passion for sound and a flair for storytelling, sound editing is not just a career, it's the future.

LEGENDS OF ADMISSIONS

1. An Unforgettable Travel Memory.

A few years ago, I spent a day with two friends in Shanghai. It was nothing dramatic, just shopping, great food, and sightseeing, yet beneath the simplicity was a decade of shared history. We first met as undergraduates at Indiana University Bloomington, where they were international students from China and we formed a close bond. After graduation, we went our separate ways, until a work trip to the DKU campus in Kunshan brought me to China and I discovered they were both living in Shanghai. Reuniting halfway across the world felt like picking up exactly where we left off, a reminder of how a global education creates memories and relationships that last long after the diploma.

2. Most unexpected question a student has ever asked you.

I once had a student ask me if he would be able to maintain his position as CEO of his start-up while attending DKU, or if that would be a conflict of interest. He was 17! I think that speaks to the unique personality traits of the students in our community. DKU students are trailblazers, and they take every opportunity to gain experience, network, and broaden their perspective. Not to mention their extraordinary ingenuity!

3. If you weren't in admissions, what job would you secretly love to have?

A travel guide, for sure! There is something so special about facilitating a life-changing experience for someone, whether it's just one person, or a group! I've had the honor to introduce several friends and family members to new countries, and each experience was one of a kind. To have that be my job would be out of my wildest dreams.

4. What's a totally random skill you've picked up because of your job?

I've somehow developed a freakishly good sense of direction, and what feels like a psychic bond with public transportation. After enough work trips spent sprinting through airports, deciphering train maps in new cities, and navigating winding streets on almost no sleep, something flipped. Now I can glance at a set of directions and basically become the route. It's my strangest (and proudest) recruiter superpower… and so far, I still haven't gotten lost.

5. What's one thing you wish students knew about admissions, that they often don't?

College admissions often feels personal, and it is natural to feel disappointed when results do not match your hopes. Even so, a university's decision is never a reflection of your value as a person or a student. Each year, universities receive far more applications than they can admit, and admissions teams must balance competing factors such as enrollment goals, financial aid limits and physical space. Because of these realities, strong and well-qualified applicants are sometimes not admitted, not because they did anything wrong, but because the process depends on many factors students never see.

6. If your college were a person, how would you describe their personality in three words?

Adventurous. Multicultural. Connected!

7. What's the most oddly specific club or organization on campus?

Definitely our Animal Protection Society. The DKU campus is home to a colony of outdoor cats, and the Society was founded to ensure these kitties are cared for and kept safe. APS members construct shelters, provide food and clean water, facilitate vet visits and spay or neuter appointments to maintain a healthy population, and connect the cats with adoptive families. They also run fundraising drives featuring artwork and postcards of the cats created by the DKU community.

Alyson Lucas
Global Recruitment Officer
Duke Kunshan University

Behind every successful student journey is an admissions professional whose experiences, insights, and passion quietly shape countless futures. Legends of Admissions celebrates these remarkable individuals, the stories they carry, the wisdom they share, and the human moments that remind us why education truly matters. In this edition, we spotlight Alyson Lucas, whose journey across cultures, conversations, and campuses offers a warm and inspiring look into the heart of admissions.

AIYYO'S RANKING OF THE MONTH
World's Best PPE Programs

Country	College	About the Course
UK	University of Oxford	https://www.ppe.ox.ac.uk/
UK	London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)	https://www.lse.ac.uk/study-at-lse/undergraduate/bsc-philosophy-politics-and-economics
UK	University of Warwick	https://warwick.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/ba-bsc-philosophy-politics-economics/
Ireland	University College Dublin (UCD)	https://www.ucd.ie/courses/bsc-philosophy-politics-economics
Ireland	Trinity College Dublin	https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/programmes/undergraduate/ppes/
UK	University of Edinburgh	https://study.ed.ac.uk/programmes/undergraduate-a-z
US	Yale University	https://epe.yale.edu/introduction-0
US	University of Michigan	https://lsa.umich.edu/ppe
US	Claremont McKenna College (CMC)	https://www.cmcppe.org/
US	University of Pennsylvania (Penn)	https://ppe.sas.upenn.edu/
US	Denison University	https://denison.edu/academics/philosophy-politics-economics
US	University of Southern California (USC)	https://catalogue.usc.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=12&poid=13517&utm
US	Duke University	https://dukeppe.trinity.duke.edu/
US	University of Washington	https://www.tacoma.uw.edu/sias/socs/politics-philosophy-and-economics-ppe
US	Virginia Tech	https://liberalarts.vt.edu/academics/majors-and-minors/philosophy-politics-and-economics-major.html
US	Pomona College	https://www.pomona.edu/academics/majors/philosophy-politics-economics
EU	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam	https://vu.nl/en/education/bachelor/philosophy-politics-and-economics
EU	Utrecht University	https://www.uu.nl/en/bachelors/philosophy-politics-and-economics
EU	University of Groningen	https://www.rug.nl/filosofie/organization/ppe/?lang=en&utm

Country	RRR	About the Course
EU	Erasmus University	https://www.eur.nl/en/euc/education/curriculum/majors
EU	Sciences Po	https://www.sciencespo.fr/en/academics/undergraduate-college/
EU	LUISS	https://www.luiss.edu/ammissione/offerta-formativa/laurea-triennale/politics-philosophy-economics
EU	IE University	https://www.ie.edu/university/studies/academic-programs/bachelor-philosophy-politics-law-economics-pple/
EU	KU Leuven	https://www.kuleuven.be/programmes/bachelor-philosophy
Asia	Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore	https://www.ntu.edu.sg/education/undergraduate-programme/bachelor-of-social-science-in-philosophy-politics-and-economics
Asia	National University of Singapore (NUS)	https://fass.nus.edu.sg/ppe/
Asia	Singapore Management University (SMU)	https://socsc.smu.edu.sg/bachelor-social-science/curriculum/politics-law-and-economics-ple-major
Asia	Duke Kunshan University (DKU)	https://ugstudies.dukekunshan.edu.cn/majors/us-studies-with-tracks-in-american-history-american-literature-political-science-and-public-policy/
Asia	Tsinghua University	https://www.tsinghua.edu.cn/en/Admissions/Undergraduate/Degree_Programs.htm
India	Ashoka University	https://www.ashoka.edu.in/programme/politics-philosophy-and-economics-major/
India	Azim Premji University (APU) India	https://azimpremjiuniversity.edu.in/programmes/ba-in-philosophy-politics-economics
India	O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU)	https://jgu.edu.in/jgu-launches-bachelor-of-arts-hons-in-philosophy-politics-economics
Australia	Deakin University	https://www.deakin.edu.au/course/bachelor-politics-philosophy-and-economics
Australia	Monash University	https://www.monash.edu/study/courses/find-a-course/politics%2C-philosophy-and-economics-a2010

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HOLDING CREDENTIALS ACCOUNTABLE TO OUTCOMES

The Changing Landscape of Learning and Economic Mobility

Shrinidhi Rao
Chief of Staff
The Burning Glass Institute

Amid escalating college costs, mounting student debt, and rising college graduate underemployment, students of all backgrounds increasingly question college as a path to economic mobility. As confidence in traditional higher education declines, interest grows in alternative pathways that offer targeted training and faster routes to meaningful work. These options include high school career and technical education (CTE) programs and short-term adult training courses proposed for Pell Grant funding expansion, both seen as vehicles for rapid skill acquisition, flexibility for learners juggling work or family commitments, and promising pathways for adults seeking to reenter or advance in the workforce.

However, enthusiasm alone cannot obscure the risks. Yet while the potential is significant, so is the risk of wasting learners' time and taxpayer dollars on credentials that don't pay off. This risk grows in a system where over 1.1 million different credentials are now on offer but with minimal oversight to separate value from empty promises. The result is a marketplace where the prevalence of options far exceeds the availability of reliable information.

A Market Flooded With Credentials but Thin on Results

The analysis reveals a stark truth. Only about 12 percent of credentials deliver significant wage gains that earners wouldn't have otherwise gotten, and just 18 percent of credential earners are likely to see wage increases their peers didn't enjoy. Despite this, millions of adults invest time, money, and hope into programs that ultimately fail to improve their economic standing.

At the same time, the upside of high-quality credentials is unmistakable. The right credentials can be transformative. Compared to bottom-tier options, credentials in the top decile yield annual wage gains of nearly 5000 dollars, increase career switching success sixfold, and boost the probability of promotion in the earner's current field 17-fold. These outcomes demonstrate what effective program design can unlock for workers across age groups and backgrounds.

Such programs also help advance equity. These top credentials can serve as effective pipelines into skilled professions, leading roughly half of earners into new jobs by equipping them with in-demand skills, and have demonstrated the power to close long-standing income gaps, particularly for historically underrepresented groups. Black and Hispanic women who earn high-value credentials, for example, experience wage increases of 10 percent or more.

Why Evidence Is Necessary for Funding

To identify the programs that produce genuine economic returns, it is necessary to examine outcomes across millions of careers. To fund transformative credentialing programs effectively, it is crucial to leverage large datasets that offer the opportunity to observe empirically the economic returns of credentials across millions of careers. Such analysis enables policymakers and institutions to evaluate the outcomes that specific credentials yield across an array of metrics and to distinguish programs that advance workers from those that do not.

This question is urgent because the policy landscape is shifting. A pressing question is whether and how government funding should support alternative pathways to economic mobility. While Pell Grants have fueled the expansion of America's college-educated workforce, public trust has weakened and Gallup polling showing a 20-point drop over the past decade illustrates skepticism toward traditional degrees.

Shorter programs are gaining attention. The proposed Workforce Pell aims to support programs lasting eight to 14 weeks, expanding access to practical training. The need is real, given that 60 percent of working Americans don't have a bachelor's degree and 77 percent of recent high school graduates either don't enroll in college, don't complete their degree, or fail to land a college-level job. Yet quality definitions remain vague. The problem lies in defining what constitutes a valuable credential. In many cases, a credential is simply a provider's assurance of mastery or even, merely, completion. Standards such as those in the Perkins Act, which require credentials to be industry-recognized, offer little guidance on the level of employer demand necessary to meet this standard.

The Wild West Environment

The credential boom continues unchecked. The world of credentials has experienced a Cambrian-like explosion: Credential Engine counts 1.1 million credentials currently on offer, a 10 percent increase in the past year alone. At the same time, completion of short-term certificates grew by a third from 2013 to 2023, reflecting a significant shift toward nondegree training. This explosion raises the central problem. But how many of these offerings help their earners launch their career, move up in their field, or switch to a new occupation? Without strong data, learners face uncertainty and policymakers lack the evidence needed to allocate resources responsibly.

Understanding What Actually Works

The value of different credentials has long been opaque. Until now, the value of different credentials has been an enigma wrapped in a riddle. Program features reveal little about real outcomes, making an outcomes-oriented lens essential. Earlier research found that only 18 percent of CTE credentials were in demand by employers, highlighting why better evaluation is needed. To address this, the analysis focuses on three questions. Will the credential increase the earner's wages. Will the credential facilitate a career switch they have been considering. Will the credential help them advance in their current field.

The findings show dramatic variation. Wage gains are only one metric of a credential's value, yet they illustrate the differences clearly. The top 10 percent of credentials provide an incremental earnings boost of nearly 5000 dollars annually after just one year, while the average credential earner earns only 1200 dollars more than their peers. Career switching results vary equally widely. Successful transitions are not a given. Bottom-tier programs produce only a 3 percentage point bump, while top credentials yield a more than sixfold increase. Advancement within a field is inconsistent as well. Few credentials are effective for workers looking to move up in their field, and even the top performers offer modest boosts.

Toward Accountability and Evidence-Based Funding

The rapid growth of the credential marketplace, including 108,000 new credentials, raises concern that providers may be underinvesting in quality assurance. Without data, unproven providers can easily launch programs and advertise them to learners, creating significant risk for both individuals and public funders. This makes the final insight essential. Any new funding for nondegree credentials must be undergirded by a rigorous data-driven evaluation of efficacy. Only by examining whether credentials help earners earn more, switch careers, and move ahead, and whether employers value them, can funding support programs that deliver real economic mobility.

Thank You, From Team Aiyyo

Thank you for taking the time to read Aiyyo. We're proud to bring you fresh, thoughtful perspectives—and it's your curiosity and engagement that fuel our work. At the heart of our mission is a desire to elevate the level of conversation around career choice and college admissions, helping readers navigate these decisions with greater clarity and confidence.

If you have any questions, feedback, or would like to contribute to a future issue, we'd love to hear from you— just drop us a line at contact@aiyyo.in. Until next time, stay sharp and stay inspired.

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