

CONFESSIONS OF A COLLEGE WHISPERER



How Do Education Companies Make Money from Study Abroad



Your Art, Your Story—Expertly Crafted



Industry Leader Spotlight
-Bharat Mundra



How Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz Prepares Students for Selective Universities Worldwide



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Editor's Note

The corridors of UK university administration are echoing with uncertainty—and for good reason. The sector is in a precarious bind: dwindling numbers of international students (with a notable drop from India), frozen domestic tuition fees, and ballooning operational costs have forced many institutions into survival mode. The result? Axed courses, staff layoffs, and desperate asset sell-offs.

Compounding the chaos, lackluster job prospects for international graduates and an increasingly inhospitable immigration regime are steering Indian students away from non-Russell Group universities. Meanwhile, the British Education Secretary has hinted that tuition hikes may be a piece of the puzzle—but admits the real remedy lies in deep structural reform. The catch? Legislative overhauls tend to tank approval ratings—especially with an election on the horizon.

With over 10,000 university jobs hanging by a thread and students facing a rapidly narrowing field of academic choices, the urgency is undeniable. Could this crisis mark a turning point? Are mid-tier and lower-ranked UK institutions now eyeing India not just as a source of students, but as fertile ground for new campuses?

The freshly minted UK-India trade deal may have opened the doors—and the University of York's soon-to-launch Mumbai campus is a bold signal of things to come. Is this the dawn of a new export model for British higher education, or just a patch on a sinking ship?

Neeraj Mandhana
Founder & Editor-in-Chief
Aiiyo

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CONFESSIONS OF A COLLEGE WHISPERER

Looking in the Mirror.

By
Neeraj Mandhana
Founder
Aiyyo



**Neeraj
Mandhana**

As Independent Educational Consultants (IECs), we often find ourselves grappling with an essential but elusive question: Am I doing a good job?

This question cuts both ways. Are we overly confident in our impact, or do we consistently undervalue the contribution we make to our students and families? The truth is, without a structured approach to measuring our success, it's easy to fall into either trap. Through ongoing conversations with colleagues, personal reflection, and trial and error, I've come to recognize that our value as IECs can—and should—be measured through a combination of tangible outcomes and more qualitative markers. While the journey is deeply meaningful and transformative for many students, outcomes still matter. Fortunately, some of these are quantifiable. Based on years of practice and insights from peers, here are seven key ways to track and measure your effectiveness as an IEC:

1. The First-Choice Outcome

Perhaps the most straightforward metric is the percentage of your students who are admitted to their top-choice schools. It's a clear indicator of your ability to understand student preferences, match them to realistic but ambitious targets, and support them through the application process. While not every student will land their top pick, a consistently high first-choice outcome percentage is a strong signal of alignment between your guidance and student aspirations.

2. Official Feedback and Ratings

Anecdotal praise is great, but systematic feedback is even better. At the end of each admissions cycle, we ask both students and parents to complete a structured feedback form—typically via Google Forms—and to leave public reviews on platforms like Google or LinkedIn. These reviews help in two ways: they provide valuable data points for internal assessment (both quantitative and qualitative), and they also bolster your professional credibility in the public eye. Make sure you actually analyze this data each year—look for patterns in satisfaction, unmet expectations, or standout successes.

3. The “Attitude of Gratitude” Test

Referrals are a powerful proxy for satisfaction. If your students and families are referring friends, extended family, or community members your way, it's a clear sign that they valued your work. Even more telling is when a parent returns a year or two later with a younger sibling in tow. Over time, you may become the “go-to counselor” for a particular school, neighborhood, or community. This kind of organic growth—rooted in trust and gratitude—is hard to measure precisely, but it is among the most validating forms of success.

4. Financial Aid and Scholarship Outcomes

Helping students secure financial aid and scholarships is one of the most impactful services we can offer. Start tracking how much money your students are saving as a result of your guidance. How many received merit- or need-based scholarships? How many earned full tuition waivers or even full-ride offers? Calculating the total sum of aid secured across all your students can be a powerful internal benchmark. It's also a great talking point when marketing your services to new families.

5. Client Retention and Long-Term Relationships

While this overlaps with referrals, it's slightly different. Track how many of your families stay in touch, share outcomes, and continue to engage with you post-application. Long-term relationships often reflect a sense of partnership and trust that goes beyond transactional work. Are former clients inviting you to their graduation ceremonies or sharing college photos years later? These are subtle but important indicators of the personal impact you've made.

6. The "Difficult Client" Ratio

Every IEC has experienced a few challenging clients—families who are never satisfied, despite your best efforts. This is normal. But if the number of these cases grows beyond a certain small threshold, it's time to take a deeper look. How many clients discontinued services midway? How many requested refunds or disengaged after applications were submitted without sharing results? What percentage of your students did not gain admission anywhere? While some outcomes are out of your control, too many red flags may suggest the need to reevaluate your process, boundaries, or client onboarding criteria.

7. Year-over-Year Growth and Learning

Finally, measure your own evolution. Are you more confident and efficient than last year? Have you added new tools, strategies, or training to your repertoire? Did you expand your network or deepen your understanding of certain programs or geographies? Personal growth and professional development should be part of your annual self-analysis.

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all metric for success as an IEC. Each student journey is unique, and outcomes will always vary. However, by tracking a combination of qualitative and quantitative indicators—ranging from admissions results to long-term relationships—you can create a more objective, comprehensive view of your impact. Not only will this help you improve year after year, but it will also give you the confidence to stand behind your value and the humility to keep growing.

Whether you're just starting out or are a seasoned consultant, take the time to reflect on your outcomes. Your students deserve the best of you—and you deserve to know just how well you're doing.



We're your friendly neighborhood independent education consultants. As India's leading body of IECs, we serve as the industry's voice. With the student's best interest in our hearts, we're raising the bar for quality of service within all our practices. Online professional development workshops, college visits, trusted vendor networks, hosting admission officers, and an awesome annual conference - that's our thang!

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HOW DO EDUCATION COMPANIES MAKE MONEY FROM STUDY ABROAD

The Four Financial Models Shaping UK International Advising

By
David Hawkins
Founder
The University Guys



David Hawkins

Over the last month, I've had cause to stop and reflect on the international university applications 'market' in the UK. Friends and colleagues will know that the very idea of education as a business is one that makes me feel uneasy, but I think that's the legacy of an idealistic desire to become a teacher rather than any horror at the reality of the world. The truth is that we all need to earn a living, and it's perfectly possible to do so while helping students at the same time.

It's coming up for three years since I returned to the UK and stepped away from work in a school, and in that time I've learnt a lot about the business of education. When I was a teacher, I think I was naive, and when I look at the sector I work in now, I can see that the nuances of how different organisations in my professional space earn their living are ones not immediately clear to the Heads of Sixth Form, Heads of Careers and university advisors I work with in schools. So, as a piece of shorthand, I wanted to try to categorise what I see when I am out and about in the UK.

To start with, I would recommend anyone on the secondary-school side here trying to work out what exactly the commodity is for each organisation. In short, what's being sold? In some cases it is a particular university's education, in others it might be the expertise of a particular person or group of people, in others the commodity is either you, or your students. Now I should make it clear that I'm not being judgemental about the rights and wrongs of these different approaches but – and I guess I was naive – when I was a Head of Careers I never saw my students as the commodity.

The first model I see is the one I am in: independent university advising. In this, the expertise of the person doing the advising is the commodity. I am selling access to me and my team at The University Guys. We charge families for our time either by-the-hour or for a full package. The visits I do to schools (either on my own, or with the universities I chaperone on the tours which I run 'at cost' and not for profit) are designed to educate students and promote the idea of international university study and then promote me as a possible option to assist students in meeting that goal. So my income comes from charging families, and the commodity is me. There is a variation on this where the commodity of expertise is charged to the school: things like SAT / ACT prep courses, essay workshops, talks to students and INSET are billed to the school, not the student. For all of these, at the centre of the model is the fact that the people giving advice are experts in this field.

The second model is agency. Unlike a lot of friends in international advising, I don't have any issue with agents, when their work is done well. I can think of three agencies in the UK who I meet regularly and respect highly: they are knowledgeable about the universities they represent and work tirelessly to bring attention of them to students. An agent is someone who has a commission-based relationship with a university university: they don't charge a family or a school, instead they take a cut of the tuition fees that

students who go through the agent will eventually pay to the partner university. In this model, expertise and relationships are being sold, both of which I think can be stronger when an agent specialises in a niche area than they can be in my model: if you are only dealing with a few universities, or one sector, then you can know it much better than when you advise on the 'whole market'. In this model what the commodity is take a little longer to work out: I would say that it is partly the expertise and connection of the agent, and partly access to students so that the agent retains their link to 'their' universities. Agency, when done well, can be very powerful: the problem is that when done badly it means that students are not being advised on all their options but only those which are likely to lead to commission for the agent. Thankfully in the UK, we have good agents working in the international space. And, as with independent counseling, they need to know their universities well to be able to do this job, meaning that students again get excellent advice.

The third model involves marketing universities, and here the commodity is, to some extent, students and schools. In this model, someone is paid by partner universities to promote them: either in terms of a flat annual fee, or a fee based on leads generated back to universities. At the core of this is promoting international university study but, crucially, in this model you don't get paid if the leads or interest for a particular group of universities come through: if all the students you meet apply to universities you don't work with, then it's going to be a bad year. Again, the UK has good people working in this space, but this model is perhaps the one that is most unclear to UK schools. Though it might appear that the 'whole market' is being promoted, the fear is that commercial considerations could get in the way. Regardless, by being partnered with universities, the likelihood is that the advice given is going to be good and – if schools are aware that students may not get advice on every option out there – can be very helpful for students.

The final model is the recruitment tour model, one I increasingly find myself seen as (given that almost no-one in the UK knows what an independent college counsellor is). Universities pay a company to run recruitment events, either fairs at central locations, or on roadshows visiting schools to engage with students. Here the commodity is somewhat different: the paying customers aren't students, or schools, or even universities returning money paid by students: here universities are paying to have access to students, facilitated by the tour company. Now I am in this space (somewhat accidentally and surprisingly) and I do struggle with this issue, hence why I keep my tour costs low: I'm not entirely comfortable with access to schools and students as the thing being sold. However, getting universities out to students – sometimes a long way from London – is work that I applaud, and I'm delighted at this time of year when I see that groups of international universities were travelling around the UK on one of these roadshows. Students have the idea of international university study brought right in front of their noses, perhaps the most powerful way to inspire them. The strength of this model is that students get access, but I'd also caution schools to be aware of the expertise model here: if your expertise is to arrange coherent tours and look after busy university recruiters, it doesn't automatically follow that you are an expert on how to make strong applications to these universities or can advise on the nuances involved in life as a student in different countries.

With these models, I'd also add that there is a big difference between the context of being knowledgeable within the UK, and being knowledgeable on a global scale. The UK is still in its nascent stages of students studying full degrees outside of the UK, and it is therefore quite easy to present oneself as an expert when – when compared to those doing this work globally – one's knowledge may be quite limited. When I was Head of Careers at Taunton School, I thought I knew loads about international university applications, that was until my first International ACAC Conference (OACAC as it was then) when I realised that I'd only made the tiniest scratch on the surface of international education. Even now, a decade into this work and having helped students apply to universities in over 20 countries, with my list of visited universities into triple figures, I look at friends based in the US or Asia who've spent their entire careers doing this work and feel like I still have much to learn. I would caution schools to be aware that giving access to someone who

just knows the names of some international universities is a very different level of expertise from that of knowing the deep nuances of how to apply to them, how successful students have been there, and (though organisations like International ACAC, IECA, HECA and the Council of International Schools) being connected to them through professional memberships.

So four different models, all good but all different. I'm pleased to work in such a positive sector in the UK, with many people making the best of their model to help students to meet their ambitions, with collaboration at the core of what we do.

LEGENDS OF ADMISSIONS



Sara Riggs

International Admission
Georgia Institute of
Technology

Ever wonder what goes on behind the scenes of college admissions? Meet the individuals who bring passion, personality, and purpose to helping students find their path.

In this edition of "Legends of Admissions," we spotlight Sara Riggs from Georgia Tech.

From unforgettable travel mishaps to trivia-ready geography skills, Sara shares insights from her journey in international admissions and offers a candid look at what it's really like to guide students through one of the most important decisions of their lives.

1. An Unforgettable Travel Memory.

I've had many unforgettable work travel moments—most of them positive! But I'll never forget my first admission trip when my rental car was broken into and all my materials were stolen right before my first college fair. It was a surprising start, but I knew I could handle anything in this job after starting out behind a table at a college fair with nothing but me.

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

I've been asked just about everything, so not much is unexpected anymore! But occasionally students ask incredibly specific major-related questions that I'm not able to answer since the student knows way more than I do about the subject area!

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

I would love to be the host of a reality-competition show like The Amazing Race or Top Chef.

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

It might not be totally random given the scope of my job, but I've developed a decent knowledge of global geography which is convenient for trivia nights.

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

In highly selective US admission, we talk about holistic review in which we consider "everything" in your application. But we are only able to consider the "everything else" after establishing a student is academically prepared for our campus. So yes, write strong essays and be engaged outside of the classroom, but don't forget to study! That said, if you're not taking an AP curriculum, there's no need to take AP exams. We don't expect you to thrive in your school community and take on additional academic coursework. We want you to excel where you are.

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

Focused, Enthusiastic, Problem Solver

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

Georgia Tech's Invention Studio is the largest student-run makerspace in the country. It's completely operated by student PIs and full of tools for creating.

YOUR ART, YOUR STORY—EXPERTLY CRAFTED

How ARTiculate Supports Students and Counsellors in Creative College Admissions

By
Tanushree Buckthorp
Director
ARTiculate



**Tanushree
Buckthorp**

"I could draw for days, but explaining what it represented always felt like a big, unsolvable puzzle," said a student who, at the time, had no idea she was on her way to RISD.

It's a sentiment I've heard often. Students who are technically skilled, but fumble when they hit the dreaded SlideRoom text box.

However, top art schools—or any selective college that invites creative submissions—are looking for more than just technical ability. They're looking for a point of view. What concepts are driving the work? How does a student's context, influences, and evolution show up across media and themes? What inspires them, and how have their ideas developed over time?

In other words, portfolio presentation is not just an accessory to the application; it is the application. This is where the strongest submissions will be the ones that feel cohesive and intentional, and where the thinking is as compelling as the making.

That's where ARTiculate comes in.

ARTiculate is a portfolio review and writing service dedicated to helping students frame their practice, both visually and narratively. We work with students on portfolio strengths and weaknesses, artist statements, and school-specific supplements that are often the most daunting parts of the art application process. Through detailed feedback and one-on-one mentorship, we help students make their work speak.

Take, for instance, this transformation:

Before:

My artwork explores how people and their legacies are fading over time. I noticed this during a visit to the Pushkar Fair, which used to be vibrant in my childhood but now feels dull and neglected.

After:

Once a fixture of my childhood, the Pushkar Fair has slowly shifted from celebration to quiet decay. These sketches (of camels, cartwheels, and Rajasthani traders) emerged from years of observing that transformation. What once felt vibrant now appears worn and hollow. Inspired by diaspora artists like Yinka Shonibare, whose work navigates identity and heritage, I began to reflect on what it means to carry cultural memory across geographies. As I prepare to study art abroad, I hope my practice will hold onto the textures of where I come from, even as it evolves elsewhere.

The difference isn't just stylistic. The second version reflects thoughtfulness and vulnerability, by showcasing an understanding of observational skills, the student's story, and historical influences. This kind of narration will not only set a student's work apart. But also help them understand their own creative voice. A voice that will serve them as a foundation in college, where thinking and writing critically about one's work is deeply embedded in the way art is taught.

ARTiculate's services also benefit schools and college counsellors, as our role is that of a strategic partner. We offer portfolio diagnostics, narrative development, and full-spectrum support tailored to each student's needs. This way, we integrate seamlessly into different college guidance structures—bringing subject-specific expertise, as well as bridging a gap in the Indian schooling system, where writing and speaking about art is rarely taught.

At its core, ARTiculate is about making art education more accessible. When students learn to articulate their process, defend their decisions, and contextualize their work, their applications rise above the rest—both as artists and thinkers.



Amit Banerjee

Billabong High International School
Bhopal

Behind every successful student is a mentor who listens, encourages, and sometimes even shares a laugh in the hallway. This month, we celebrate Amit Banerjee from Billabong High International School, Bhopal—a counselor whose two decades in education have left a lasting impact on students, teachers, and administrators alike. From hearing the funniest student comments to imagining a comic book superpower, Amit brings wisdom, empathy, and a healthy dose of humor to his work every day. Get to know the person behind the guidance, and discover what keeps him inspired after all these years.

SCHOOL COUNSELLOR OF THE MONTH

What's the weirdest/funniest thing you ever heard a student or parent say?

It was when two of my favourite students came to me, sad. When I asked them what had happened, they replied, "We are so fond of you, which is why we are sad." Intrigued, I asked them to explain. They said, "By the time we are successfully settled in life, we have good jobs and families too, and we would want to come to you to make you feel proud, but...". "But...?" I asked back. One of them replied with a lot of hesitation, " ...But you would be dead by then!" I laughed out real bad in the corridor. I said, "Don't worry, I will ghost you then!"

If you had to write a college essay about yourself, what would your topic be?

"My Life: A Roller Coaster Ride"

What's the most oddly satisfying part of your job that no one ever thinks about?

After spending two decades in the system, I can see the awe in the eyes of many around me, including my students, teachers and management.

What would your "Guidance Counselor Superpower" be if you were in a comic book?

To be able to hear what my students think when they are interacting with teachers who are at times annoyed by them.

Which fictional character do you think would make a surprisingly great guidance counsellor?

Omni - Man: One who continues to gradually grow stronger the more he struggles and ages.

What's your go-to motivational phrase that even you roll your eyes at sometimes—but it works?

"Keep installing the better version of yourself"



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Industry Leader SPOTLIGHT



Bharat Mundra

Director
IBOS

In this section, Aiiyo 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 Bharat Mundra, the Director of IBOS, to uncover what drives his success, how he balances the demands of work and life, and the mantra that keeps him moving forward.

What was your college degree?

Msc Management from University of Bath, UK

Your Favorite Book

Ikigai

Your Comfort Food

Lebanese

A School/College you really enjoyed visiting

The Loharu Montessori Children's House, Jaipur.

What's on top of your bucket list?

Paragliding Interlaken

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

Don't be afraid to take the road less traveled—curiosity and courage go hand in hand.

One thing you would most like to change about the world

Equal access to quality education for every child, regardless of geography or socioeconomic background.

What inspired you to do what you do?

A deep curiosity about human potential and how technology can amplify it.

A secret to balancing work & life

Set sacred "unplugged" hours—no screens, just people, nature, or stillness.

Your Life Mantra

"Stay curious. Stay kind."

HOW LYCEUM ALPINUM ZUOZ PREPARES STUDENTS FOR SELECTIVE UNIVERSITIES WORLDWIDE

Between Mountains and Mindsets: Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz and the Meaning of Global Education

By
Valerie Scullion
Head of Admissions & Marketing
Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz



**Valerie
Scullion**

In the context of global education, international families are increasingly prioritising institutions that combine academic depth with intercultural competence. Located in Zuoz, a village in the Engadin valley just 20 minutes from St. Moritz, Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz offers a structured and internationally oriented learning environment. The school hosts students from over 45 countries and provides two academically rigorous pathways: the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme and the Swiss Matura. Both programmes are designed to prepare students for competitive university entry, while also fostering personal responsibility and multilingual proficiency in a distinctly alpine setting.

A Values-based Approach with Strong Academic Frameworks

Founded in 1904, the school builds on a long-standing tradition of academic seriousness combined with a strong ethical framework. Its educational approach is grounded in three core values: respect, fair play, and ambition. These values are integrated into both academic and residential life, guiding interactions between students and staff across all aspects of school life.

The academic offering is structured around two internationally recognised curricula. The IB Diploma Programme, taught primarily in English, is well suited for students aiming for English-speaking universities worldwide. It encourages independent research, interdisciplinary learning, and reflection. At Lyceum Alpinum, the IB is complemented by the CAS component (Creativity, Activity, Service), which ensures that students engage with the broader community and develop skills beyond academic performance.

The Swiss Matura, by contrast, offers a nationally recognised route to university that is particularly relevant for students intending to study in Switzerland or continental Europe. It provides a broad general education with subject specialisations in areas such as biology and chemistry, economics and law, or applied mathematics. The Matura is available in a bilingual format (German/English), and students benefit from small class sizes and close academic mentoring throughout.

Boarding, Community and Life Beyond the Classroom

In both programmes, language learning and multilingual competence are emphasised. Students learn in both English and German, and the school's day-to-day environment reflects the linguistic diversity of its community.

Boarding is an integral part of the educational structure. Students live in age-appropriate houses, supported by residential mentors who offer academic and personal guidance. The school maintains a structured daily routine, balancing academic responsibilities with co-curricular activities and personal time. The surrounding alpine environment provides access to a wide range of sports and outdoor pursuits, including skiing, hiking and mountain biking, all of which are built into the broader educational experience.

While CAS is a core part of the IB Diploma, all students at Lyceum Alpinum benefit from a rich co-curricular programme. More than 70 weekly activities are available, ranging from debating and music ensembles to robotics and drama. These activities are designed to encourage initiative, collaboration, and long-term engagement.

International Perspectives from the First Encounter to Graduation

For many families, the International Summer Camps serve as an initial introduction to the school. Open to children aged 10 to 16, the camps offer a combination of language instruction (in English, German or French), creative workshops, and outdoor activities. A separate Junior Day Camp is available for children aged 6 to 9. The summer programmes reflect the school's values and international atmosphere, and for some students, they are the first step towards joining the full-time academic community.

With over 3,500 alumni in more than 40 countries, Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz maintains a strong and expanding international network. Graduates continue on to universities across Europe, North America and Asia. Many remain connected to the school through the Zuoz Club, which offers mentoring opportunities, regional alumni gatherings and a lasting sense of community that extends well beyond graduation.

In a competitive global education landscape, Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz distinguishes itself through academic clarity, cultural inclusivity and a well-structured boarding environment. For internationally minded families, it offers an education that is both rooted in European educational tradition and oriented towards the future.

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INSIDE THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME'S 5-YEAR CLASSICAL ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM

From Studio to Thesis: Notre Dame's Complete B.Arch. Journey

By
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**Ravisha
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For prospective students seeking an intensive and philosophically rooted architectural education, the University of Notre Dame School of Architecture offers one of the nation's most distinctive five-year Bachelor of Architecture (B.Arch.) programs. Firmly grounded in classical architecture, traditional urbanism, and the building arts, Notre Dame's curriculum combines rigorous design training with humanistic scholarship, interdisciplinary analysis, and field-based experiential learning.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Approach

The B.Arch. curriculum is carefully sequenced across ten semesters and integrates design studios, architectural history and theory, building technology, and the liberal arts. In the early years, students acquire spatial fluency through hand drafting, measured drawing, analytical sketching, and watercolor rendering, which are seen as essential to understanding architectonic composition and the principles of proportion. Only after this tactile foundation is developed do students advance to digital modeling, CAD, and BIM software in upper-level studios.

All students participate in vertically integrated studios with design problems ranging from single-family dwellings and civic institutions to complex urban sites. Projects are embedded in a broader study of typology, morphology, tectonics, and contextual design. Each studio integrates rigorous site analysis, climatic response, and material systems, while reinforcing composition, symmetry, and hierarchical ordering.

Rome Studies Program

The required third year in the Rome Studies Program is perhaps the most defining feature of Notre Dame's architectural education. Based at the university's facility in the historic Centro Storico, this immersive experience combines on-site sketching, measured drawing, urban morphology, and precedent analysis. Students study firsthand the principles of classical and Renaissance urbanism, analyze the spatial hierarchies of historic piazze, and produce freehand renderings of canonical monuments, including the Pantheon, Palazzo Farnese, and San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane.

Rome coursework includes intensive design studios alongside seminars in architectural theory, sacred architecture, and urban design history, with students building an encyclopedic visual and spatial memory through weekly field studies. This embodied learning model fosters a lasting understanding of proportional systems, architectural grammar, and civic order, tools that students carry into their fourth- and fifth-year work.

Specialized Concentrations

In their final two years, students may pursue specialized concentrations in:

- **Furniture Design:** Students engage in the full-scale design and construction of bespoke pieces using traditional techniques. The coursework emphasizes ergonomic design, joinery, material performance, and historic pattern language, with hands-on work in wood and mixed media.
- **Preservation and Restoration:** This track provides a deep dive into architectural conservation, including masonry pathology, building diagnostics, historic materials, and the legal/ethical frameworks governing preservation. Students produce measured drawings of at-risk heritage sites.
- **Building Arts:** This concentration trains students in the craftsman's perspective, focusing on traditional construction techniques, ornamental detail, and manual fabrication. It prepares future designers to collaborate with tradespeople and emphasizes the continuity between design and construction.

Fifth-Year Thesis

All B.Arch. candidates complete an independent fifth-year thesis, developed under faculty mentorship over two semesters. This culminating project challenges students to synthesize their training into a coherent architectural proposition. Each thesis includes a programmatic brief, precedent research, site analysis, formal studies, orthographic documentation, axonometric projections, and physical models. Past theses have investigated topics ranging from sacred architecture and agrarian settlement design to urban housing typologies and contemporary classical idioms.

Facilities and Resources

The program is housed in the award-winning Walsh Family Hall of Architecture, a building designed to embody the school's values through its colonnaded loggias, symmetrical plan, and stone detailing. It contains open-plan studios flooded with natural light, advanced fabrication labs, digital visualization suites, a dedicated woodshop, and gallery spaces for exhibitions and critiques. The building's architecture reinforces the discipline's civic role and serves as a living teaching tool.

Faculty and Mentorship

Notre Dame's faculty comprises practicing architects, urbanists, artisans, and theorists committed to a humanist and ethical vision of practice. Many are internationally recognized figures in the New Classical Architecture movement and are active in organizations such as the Institute of Classical Architecture & Art (ICAA) and the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU). Small studio sizes and a low student-to-faculty ratio foster close mentorship and individualized critique, promoting a culture of excellence and rigor.

Admissions and Preparation

Admission to the School of Architecture follows the university's holistic undergraduate process. While a portfolio is not required, applicants are encouraged to demonstrate a sustained interest in architecture, visual arts, design, or urbanism. About 30–50 first-year students enter as declared architecture majors and immediately begin the studio sequence, meaning early commitment is essential for those pursuing the B.Arch.

Professional Outcomes

Notre Dame architecture graduates consistently place in leading design firms, planning offices, and preservation organizations. Many pursue licensure through the Architectural Experience Program (AXP) and ARE 5.0, while others matriculate into top-tier M.Arch and Ph.D. programs. Alumni are known for their broad design literacy, classical training, and ability to navigate both historical contexts and contemporary challenges with ethical clarity and technical competence.

Conclusion

For students seeking a classical architectural education grounded in history but responsive to modern demands, the University of Notre Dame offers unmatched preparation. With its fusion of traditional design pedagogy, global immersion, and craft-based learning, the School of Architecture stands apart as a leader in architectural education committed to beauty, durability, and civic responsibility.



THE COMMON APP MAIN ESSAY: BALANCING NARRATIVE AND REFLECTION

By
Bhupender Bharadwaj
NM Squad

There it is—that blank page. The cursor blinks, steadily, expectantly. You stare, wondering how to begin what is supposed to be one of the most important writing pieces in your academic life. The Common App main essay has earned its reputation as a high-stakes exercise, and understandably so. With just 650 words, you're asked to present your story, your voice, your values, and your perspective—all without sounding rehearsed or cliché.

The pressure often leads students to overreach. They attempt to sound profound, dramatic, or overly polished, opening with lines like, "Ever since I was four, I knew I wanted to change the world." Or "The dictionary defines perseverance as..." While well-intentioned, this kind of writing risks feeling formulaic and impersonal.

The truth is, a successful Common App main essay finds its power not in grand declarations, but in authenticity. At its core, this is an opportunity to narrate a meaningful experience and reflect on it with sincerity and insight. It is this balance between narrative and reflection that elevates an essay from good to memorable.

Tell a Story Only You Can Tell

You need not have climbed Mount Kilimanjaro or cured a disease. Often, it is the quieter, more personal experiences that resonate most. Maybe it's how you handled a setback in your school's theatre production when the lights went out during your monologue. Or the summer you spent learning to cook from your grandmother—"measuring spices not with spoons but with instinct and stories." What matters is not the scale of the story, but that it is uniquely yours.

A well-chosen anecdote has the power to ground your essay in lived experience. It gives readers something to visualize, to remember. It brings your voice to life.

A quiet, specific truth is often more powerful than a sweeping, generic statement.

Show, Then Reflect Many students make the mistake of writing essays that are all story and no meaning—or all meaning and no story. You need both. Think of the narrative as the body of your work and the reflection as its heart.

Don't merely describe what happened. Consider: Why did it matter to you? What did it change about your thinking, your behavior, or your worldview? How do you see yourself—or the world—differently as a result?

For instance, writing "I spent weekends painting a community mural" becomes far more compelling when followed by "It taught me how public art could spark unexpected conversations between strangers who'd never otherwise connect."

Colleges are not just looking for a compelling event; they're looking for evidence of growth, thoughtfulness, and perspective.

Admissions officers are not seeking perfect answers; they're seeking thoughtful minds.

Balance Is Everything

A strong essay strikes a delicate balance between narration and introspection. If you spend too much time on the storytelling, the essay risks becoming a compelling tale with little takeaway. If you lean too heavily into reflection without grounding the ideas in specific events or experiences, it may feel like an abstract thought piece rather than a personal statement.

The most effective essays weave both elements seamlessly. They present a vivid moment—something the reader can picture—then follow it up with thoughtful commentary that shows how that moment shaped you. This balance creates depth. It signals maturity. It suggests that you're not just recounting what happened, but that you've taken the time to process and grow from it.

Consider pacing: if your story takes 500 words and your reflection is squeezed into the last 150, the essay may feel rushed or incomplete. Conversely, if you begin with a vague philosophical musing—"Time is like a river, constantly flowing"—and only get to the story at the end, you've likely lost your reader's engagement. Intertwining narrative with insight throughout the piece often yields the strongest result.

When in doubt, ask yourself: am I both showing and saying something meaningful?

Let Your Personality Shine

While grammar, structure, and clarity are essential, the essay should still sound like you. Allow your personality to emerge through your tone, your choice of story, your humor (if appropriate), and your honesty. Do not iron out every informal phrase or original expression in an effort to sound "smart." You are not submitting a research paper—you are presenting yourself.

For instance, writing "I once ruined my science fair project with baking soda, tears, and a very sticky volcano" is far more engaging than "I experienced setbacks in scientific experimentation."

Authenticity is far more memorable than artificial perfection.

The Common App main essay is not meant to be a performance. It is meant to be a portrait. It is your opportunity to step away from transcripts and test scores and speak directly to the person reading your application. Use it wisely. Share something real. Reflect deeply. Write thoughtfully.

If, by the end, the reader feels like they've glimpsed something true about who you are—something no other part of your application could have shown—then you've done your job.

And that blinking cursor? It's just the beginning of your voice, waiting to be heard.

FAILURE IS NOT THE END, IT'S THE BEGINNING

When It All Falls Apart: Your Rebirth Begins Here

By
Soumya Ramaswamy
Founder & Parenting and Teen Coach
Shaping Futures



**Soumya
Ramaswamy**

We've all had those gut-wrenching moments where everything just... breaks. You pour your heart and soul into something, your studies, a dream job, a relationship, or a long-cherished vision, only to watch it unravel. And when it does, the disappointment is heavy. It lingers. It whispers that maybe you weren't enough. Maybe it was never meant to be. Maybe you are not cut out for this! In those moments, failure feels like a painful, final full stop. But what if it isn't the end?

What if it's a beginning, a doorway, awkward and messy, but real into a version of life more honest, more aligned, more powerful, and more you?

As a parenting and teen coach, I often see how deeply we fear failure. It rattles our self-worth, clouds our direction, and tempts us to give up on ourselves. But over the years, I've also seen something else: **Failure isn't what breaks us—it's what wakes us.**

Let's get real. Failure hurts. It can shake everything you believe about yourself. It can make you question your value and fear being seen. It can isolate you in silence.

But here's the truth: Failure is not the opposite of success. It is part of it. Failure is often the exact moment your truest learning begins.

What Failure Teaches Us

When something crumbles, it clears the path for something else to emerge. A truth. A shift. A redirection. It invites us to:

- Strip away the noise
- Let go of what wasn't working
- Reconnect with our values
- Begin again from a deeper, more grounded place

You can't fake your way through failure. You can't bypass it. But if you stay with it, even briefly, it can become your turning point.

So... How Do We Begin Again?

Here are a few simple, soulful practices that have helped me and that I offer to you, if you're in the middle of something hard:

1. Let Yourself Feel It.

Don't rush to "get over it." Cry. Scream. Write. Sit with it. Let yourself fully experience the grief, the anger, the disappointment, all the emotions that you feel then. Healing begins the moment we stop pretending we're okay but accept it and finally say, "I'm not... yet." There's power in naming what hurts.

2. Ask gentle questions.

Self-inquiry is more powerful than self-judgment. Instead of asking, "What's wrong with me?", ask:

- What is this experience trying to teach me?
- Where is it pointing me next?
- What truth have I been avoiding?
- What new possibilities are opening up, even if I can't see them yet?

These questions won't erase the pain, but they will help you turn it into wisdom.

3. Speak Kindly to Yourself.

You are not a failure. You are someone who dared to try. Someone who invested fully. Someone who dared to care. The voice in your head? Let it soften. Speak to yourself the way you would to someone you love—because you deserve that too.

4. Take One Tiny Step.

Don't wait for clarity to take action; clarity often comes from action and in the process. Whether it's making a call, journaling, going for a walk, or simply getting out of bed, every step counts. Movement, however small, creates momentum. And with momentum, the fog starts to lift.

5. Lean on Someone.

We were never meant to do this alone. Call a friend. Message a coach. Read someone's story. Reach out. Sometimes, the most healing words we can hear are: "Me too. I've been there." Community turns isolation into connection, and connection creates strength.

6. Don't Hide Your Failure.

When we hide our failures, we aren't just protecting ourselves, we're also denying ourselves a chance to grow.

Hiding failure is like closing the door to a powerful classroom. It sends the message that failure is shameful, rather than human. But when you share what didn't work, with honesty and grace, you permit others to do the same. You create a culture where learning is valued more than perfection. And most importantly, you reclaim your story.

Because vulnerability is not weakness.

This Is Your Turning Point

Failure doesn't get the final word unless you hand it the pen. And honestly... You are far too resilient, too wise, and too full of fire to let that happen. So here's to your bounce-back.

The messy one. The brave one. The one where your eyes are still puffy but your heart is cracked open with hope. The one where you whisper, "Okay, life... I'm still here. Let's try again." Because while failure may have knocked you down, it also woke something fierce and tender within you.

And that is your true beginning.

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AT WE-LEARN, JUGAAD ISN'T JUST A TERM, IT'S A WAY OF LIFE

The Studio Where Scraps Become Stories and Mistakes Lead to Magic

By
Neha Pandit
Founder
We-Learn



Neha Pandit

Have you ever seen someone turn a broken brush into a painting tool with just their fingers? At We-Learn, moments like these are not rare, they are the norm. Because here, jugaad is not just a quirky term from India. It is a philosophy. A way of thinking. And most importantly, a way of creating.



Born and raised in India, we have this natural instinct for turning problems into creative solutions. The beauty of jugaad lies in its ability to innovate with the materials and resources at hand, and it is in every aspect of our work, especially when it comes to art. Whether it is finding unconventional materials or turning limited resources into something extraordinary, jugaad is at the heart of every brushstroke and design decision.



Rethinking the Ordinary

At We-Learn, creativity does not just come from waiting for inspiration to strike. It comes from creating your own spark and embracing the resources at hand. Got a pile of random fabric scraps? Perfect! time to dive into a textile DIY project. An empty jar of paint? No problem, let us turn that into an abstract painting. We do not wait for the perfect materials or the ideal setup to create something new. We take what we have and make it work

Take Dhriti, for example, a quiet but wildly imaginative student with a love for watercolor illustration. She dreamed of entering product design, but her experience was mostly in painting. Instead of pushing her to start from scratch, we encouraged her to bring her watercolor world into design. One such project involved converting her delicate watercolor artwork into a packaging design for a bakery. The soft, dreamy feel of her watercolor pieces perfectly complemented the bakery's charming, inviting vibe. "I never thought my paintings could become packaging," she said. "Now, I can not wait to design more!"



Embracing the Beauty of Imperfection

But, it is not just about fixing mistakes, it is about embracing the beauty of unconventional solutions. The concept of jugaad in art encourages us to find new ways to express, innovate, and adapt by thinking outside the box, or better yet, creating a whole new box.

Sometimes, the joy of creativity comes from the unexpected moments, the “aha” moments when you realize, “Wait, this actually works!” The best part about jugaad is not just about solving problems; it is about discovering joy in the process. Whether it is laughing over an accidental masterpiece or bonding with fellow creators over a quirky idea, the energy in our studio is always alive with collaboration and fun. “The best part of class is when something ‘goes wrong,’” laughed Antara, a senior design student. “Because that is when the coolest ideas start to flow.”

For example, there was another project where one of our students, Ananya, stumbled upon a fallen log during a casual walk in the park. Most people would have walked past it, but not her. She saw potential. After bringing it back to the studio, the log became the base for a whimsical mushroom installation. Using clay and a bit of paint, we transformed it into a magical forest floor scene,



complete with vibrant fungi and tiny forest creatures. What started as a forgotten piece of wood turned into an enchanting centerpiece. It was a perfect example of how, with a little imagination and a touch of jugaad, nature itself becomes part of the art. “At first, we were frustrated,” said Ananya “but once we started experimenting, it actually turned out way cooler than we imagined.”



Thinking Beyond the Obvious

When you walk into a We-Learn classroom or studio, do not be surprised if the tools are not what you expected or the solutions are not as traditional as you imagined. That is the beauty of jugaad, it is about rethinking the ordinary and challenging the way things are “supposed” to be done.

One particularly inspiring project involved using Rajasthani kharwas (woven leaves traditionally used for household items), to create a sustainable hut model. Instead of using conventional building materials, we repurposed the kharwas to form a hut. The texture and color of the leaves gave the structure an earthy, organic feel. This creative solution was not only environmentally friendly but also allowed us to showcase a traditional material in a new, innovative way.



Conclusion



In the end, jugaad is not just about quick fixes. It is about shifting your lens and seeing not what is missing, but what is possible. At We-Learn, this way of thinking transforms limitations into launchpads, setbacks into stories, and classrooms into creative playgrounds. Because when you learn to embrace the imperfect, the unpredictable, and the unconventional, you unlock your truest creative potential.

And that, right there, is the Indian way of doing art, with heart, hustle, and a whole lot of jugaad.

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FROM POMONA TO PURPOSE: HOW INTERDISCIPLINARY LEARNING LAUNCHED MY LIFE'S WORK

Inside the Liberal Arts Classroom That Sparked a Startup and a Mission

By
Aashna Saraf
Founder
CreatED



Aashna Saraf

When people ask where my journey as an entrepreneur and educator began, I don't point to my first pitch deck or my earliest startup idea. I point to a classroom at Pomona College, where there were fewer than fifteen students, a whiteboard covered in ideas, and professors who didn't just lecture — he listened.

Pomona wasn't just my college. It was my incubator.

The Power of Small

In a world obsessed with scale, Pomona taught me the power of the small. Small classes where you're not just another body in the room — you're noticed. One morning, I overslept for a seminar. No big deal, I thought. But halfway through what should've been class time, I got a text from my professor:

"Hey Aashna, everything okay?"

It wasn't about attendance. It was about care.

That moment stayed with me. At Pomona, professors weren't gatekeepers — they were mentors who paid attention, who asked questions that extended beyond the syllabus. The intimacy of a 10- or 12-person seminar made space not just for academic rigor, but for human connection. It created a culture where learning was personal — and where showing up, in every sense of the word, mattered.

Daring Greatly (and Weirdly)

I didn't just study across departments — I collided with them. One semester, I found myself rebranding an ice cream parlor's storefront in a class about failing boldly. Another, I staged a performance-art-level social experiment, carrying a friend in a body bag across the village to explore societal discomfort in a course called I Disagree.

Yes, that actually happened.

But the real turning point came when I was selected for a one-of-its-kind co-op program, the Silicon Valley Program. I spent a semester working full-time in Silicon Valley under a billionaire entrepreneur — a Stanford Business School professor and former McKinsey consultant — while Pomona professors in leadership, economics, and systems design flew out every weekend to teach our tight-knit cohort of 12–15 students.

I spent weekdays immersed in high-stakes automation projects and no-code systems, and weekends diving deep into business models and behavioral design — learning from both the boardroom and the classroom, simultaneously.

From Senior Thesis to Startup

By my fourth year, I co-founded a tech company with my psychology professor. What began as a senior thesis in psychology turned into my first startup. In the middle of the COVID lockdowns, it was impossible to visit schools to collect data on child development—every campus had shut its doors. During office hours with Professor Pat Smiley, I asked, “What if I build an app and use it as a research tool for early math education in preschoolers? Can I write my thesis on that?” Pat not only loved the idea—she joined me as a co-founder. Together, we raised capital, eventually securing backing from the former CEO of Google. Our math education app scaled to over 10,000 users within the semester. That thesis? It earned the Senior Award and helped me get a spot at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

That’s the thing about Pomona — professors don’t just grade your work. They build with you. That classroom-to-cofounder pipeline could only exist in an environment where hierarchy took a back seat to curiosity, where the classroom wasn’t a destination, but a springboard.

We prototyped tools for behavior change, experimented with regression models, debated the ethics of data collection — all while I was still figuring out how to do laundry consistently. It was the most thrilling, terrifying, empowering kind of learning there is.

Why It Still Matters

Today, I run Created — an innovation hub where students across India design projects at the intersection of science, tech, and empathy. We’ve launched AI-powered stethoscopes, emotion-recognition tools for autism, eco-housing prototypes, and policy platforms for workers. Everything we teach — cross-disciplinary collaboration, real-world prototyping, fearless inquiry — traces back to those classrooms in Pomona.

Pomona didn’t just give me knowledge. It gave me permission.

Permission to blur the lines between disciplines.

To learn like a rebel and build like a founder.

To treat education not as a path to answers, but as a process of better questions.

That’s not just the power of a liberal arts education. That’s the power of being seen, stretched, and set free to build something meaningful.



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THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL LANDSCAPE IN SRI LANKA

Academic Rigor Meets Holistic Growth at One of Sri Lanka's Top International Schools

By
Vinita Shenoy
Principal
Gateway College - Colombo



Vinita Shenoy

Sri Lanka has seen a significant rise in the establishment of international schools over the past few decades since the implementation of National language schools only. These schools often cater to expatriates and local families seeking an international standard of education. The landscape is diverse, featuring various curricula including British, American, Japanese, French, Australian and International Baccalaureate (IB). The most common being the British Pearson Edexcel and Cambridge International examinations.

International Baccalaureate (IB), is offered by one school, so is the American High School Diploma. The South Australian Certificate of Education is again offered by one leading school in Sri Lanka.

Student Diversity: International schools in Sri Lanka enjoy a diverse student body, comprising local students alongside international expatriates, which enriches the learning environment.

Extracurricular Activities: Many international schools place a strong emphasis on extracurricular activities, providing students with opportunities in sports, arts, and community service. The ISAC – International Schools Athletic Championships held recently brought together the best athletes of all the top International schools. Besides this the International schools in turn organize basketball, football, squash, cricket, dance, quiz to name a few competitions bring out the best in the students.

About Gateway College:

1. Overview

Gateway College, founded in 1998, has established itself as one of the foremost international schools in Sri Lanka. With campuses in Colombo and other regions, it caters to students from preschool through to A-Levels.

2. Academic Programs

Gateway offers the British national curriculum, including IGCSE and A-Level qualifications, along with a focus on the SACE program. The school is recognized for its academic rigor and consistently performs well achieving the best results in public examination. The high achievers gain admission to prestigious universities worldwide, with some students winning scholarships ranging from 20 %to 120%.

3. Facilities and Infrastructure

Gateway College is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities including science laboratories, libraries, art studios, and sports complexes. The school emphasizes the use of technology in education, providing students with access to modern learning tools and resources.

4. Extracurricular Activities

Gateway College promotes a holistic approach to education, offering a wide range of extracurricular activities. These include sports, music and drama clubs, and various interest-based societies that encourage personal development.

5. Community Engagement

The school is actively involved in community service initiatives, encouraging students to engage with local communities and develop a sense of social responsibility.

6. International Exposure

Gateway College has exchange programs and collaborations with international schools, allowing students exposure to global cultures and educational practices.

7. Reputation and Recognition

The school is well-regarded among parents and students alike for its commitment to high educational standards, individual student development, and career counseling services that prepare students for further education.

Conclusion

The international school landscape in Sri Lanka presents a multitude of opportunities for students, with Gateway College standing out as a leading institution. Its commitment to academic excellence, diverse extracurricular offerings, state-of-the-art facilities, and focus on holistic development make it a commendable choice for families seeking a quality international education. As international education continues to grow in Sri Lanka, schools like Gateway College will likely play a pivotal role in shaping the future of its citizens.

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