

Access Academy Webinar Series:

U.S. Universities in Depth

23rd of June 2020

Panellists: Andres Sebastian Lee, Yan Chan, Harrison Smith



project access



Agenda

Introductions

Pre-University: Applications and Finances

Life at University: Teaching and Extracurriculars

Post-University: Job opportunities and further studies

Q&A

Mission to help untraditional students



Project Access is an **international non-profit** set up to provide **bright students from untraditional backgrounds** with personal mentors, who are currently university students at one of our target universities

We have a network of

160+ team members

3,500+ mentors

We have supported

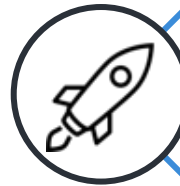
3,000+ aspiring students!



Mentees come from untraditional backgrounds and need resources and guidance



Mentors help students navigate the application process and offer 1:1 support



Once they receive an offer, mentees form part of our campus community

Introductions



Yan Chan
Fresh Grad
Columbia – Economics and
Political Science



Andy Lee
Rising Junior
Stanford – International
Relations, Minor in
Comparative Literature



Harrison Smith
Rising Junior
Yale – History and
Computer Science

A grayscale photograph of three students in a science laboratory. They are gathered around a table, focused on their work. One student in the foreground is using a long black rod. Various pieces of laboratory equipment, including a power supply, a beaker, and a small electronic device, are scattered on the table. The background shows a typical lab setting with shelves and equipment.

PRE-UNIVERSITY (APPLICATIONS AND FINANCES) HARRISON SMITH

US Application Process – Standardized Tests

ACT (American College Testing)

- Out of 36
- Scientific Reasoning, English, Reading, and Math (+ an optional essay)
 - Each section scored out of 36
- Final score is an average of the four
- Offered 7 times per year
- Cost: \$50 for the standard assessment, \$67 if you also do the essay
- Total time: 3 hours 5 minutes without the writing section, 3 hours 45 minutes with the writing section

US Application Process – Standardized Tests

SAT

- Out of 1600
- 2 sections: Reading and Writing, and Math. Each scored out of 800 and combined for the final score.
- Each section is broken into 2 tests: Reading Test, Writing and Language Test, Non-Calculator Math Test, Calculator Math Test.
- Offered seven times a year in the United States and offered four times a year out of USA: in October, December, March and May.
- Cost: \$50 for the standard assessment, \$64.50 if you also do the optional essay. Additional processing fees if taken internationally.
- Total time: 3 hours without optional essay, 3 hours 50 minutes with the essay

US Application Process – Standardized Tests

SAT Subject Tests

- Out of 800
- Optional, but highly encouraged for top schools
- 20 possible subjects, many students will do two subject tests
- Time: All take 1 hour to complete
- Offered at the same time as the SAT tests
- Cost: \$48 per test

US Application Process – Common App Essays



PERSONAL ESSAY IN
ANSWER TO ONE OF 7
PROMPTS



MAXIMUM WORD COUNT:
650



KEY DIFFERENTIATING PART
OF THE APPLICATION
PROCESS



GET FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND
TEACHERS TO READ AND
FEEDBACK ON YOUR ESSAY



PROJECT ACCESS CAN HELP
YOU AT EVERY STEP!

US Application Process – College-specific Essays

- Each college has a set of short questions designed to help them get to know you better and understand whether you would be a good addition to their community
- Each set of questions is unique, but all will ask: why do you want to come here, specifically?

Examples

- Yale: You are teaching a Yale course, what is it called?
- Stanford: Write a note to your future roommate that reveals something about you or that will help your roommate—and us—get to know you better.
- Columbia: please list a few words or phrases that describe your ideal college community.

Project Access can help you at every step!

US Application Process – Interviews

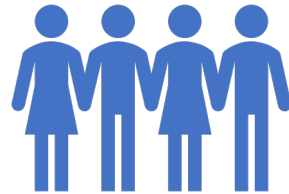
Alumni from the colleges you apply to will interview you, if possible

Colleges try to interview as many people as they can

Interviews are relatively informal and conversational; the college is trying to get to know you better

Project Access can help you at every step!

US Application Process – Open Days



All schools host open days and weekends for successful applicants

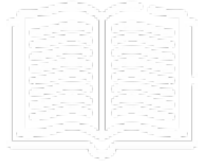


Applicants often stay with undergraduates and can attend lectures, club meetings, and eat in dining halls – the university is trying to sell itself to you

How to Prepare

Three Pillars of Success:

1. **Solid Fundamentals** – attention to detail, great grades and references, *practice, practice and practice* for your tests and interviews!
2. **Intellectual Development** – (1) books, academic papers, articles and blogs – what do undergraduates or academics in your field read? and (2) super-curriculars, including academic competitions and discussion groups – practice structuring and arguing for your views with clarity, both in written and oral forms. It is never too early or too late!
3. **Extracurricular development** – Focus on a few passions that you can use to tell your story and demonstrate to the college that you will be a valuable addition to their community.



US Finances

MOST PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES HAVE A NEED-BASED FINANCIAL AID SYSTEM THAT AWARDS STUDENTS A SCHOLARSHIP BASED ON THE AMOUNT THE UNIVERSITY BELIEVES THEY CAN AFFORD TO PAY. THIS AID CAN OFTEN BE APPLIED TO SUMMER CLASSES, TOO.

TUITION CAN COST AROUND \$50,000 WITHOUT FINANCIAL AID. HOWEVER, AROUND 90% OF STUDENTS RECEIVE AID. ALL STUDENTS HAVE TO PAY FOR BOOKS AND OTHER MATERIALS.

MOST UNIVERSITIES ARE CATERED AND YOU HAVE TO LIVE ON CAMPUS FOR THE FIRST TWO YEARS

MOST STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITIES WILL HAVE A PART-TIME JOB – IT IS ENCOURAGED.

US Finances - Analysis

1. In general, funding support is more difficult in the UK, so do consider the US as well if your household qualifies as low-income
2. However, do a thorough research on scholarships, both provided by your country, the university or third parties (e.g. Jardine, Rhodes, Gates) – if still uncertain, just contact the universities!
3. Many funding supports come only if you have already secured a place – so likely worth applying regardless
4. More subtle disparities in cost of livings – between different geographies and between different Oxbridge colleges (generally, wealthier colleges = lower CoL) – research and ask your PA mentors
5. Some universities, like Oxford, do not allow part-time work during the term!



LIFE AT UNIVERSITY

ANDY LEE

Teaching in the US



Teaching in the US is divided between **lectures** and **seminars** (but can also include labs and performance-based assignments according to the subject area you're studying).



Classes often only meet a few times per week, meaning there is generally a **wide range of flexibility** available in your college schedule



In general, all students are allocated a **personal adviser** whose role is to offer support and guidance.

Assessments in the US



Various assessment methods in US universities: exams, presentations, essays, reports.



Exam periods (or finals) differ according to each university – but in general: one in **December/January** and one in **May/June** (sometimes also in **March**)

- "Dead weeks?"
- Semester vs quarter system
- Midterms



Specific **grading system** in the US:

- Curve-based grading?

Letter Grade	Percentage	GPA
A+	97%+	4.33/4.00 or 4.00/4.00
A	93%-96%	4.00/4.00
A-	90%-92%	3.67/4.00
B+	87%-89%	3.33/4.00
B	83%-86%	3.00/4.00
B-	80%-82%	2.67/4.00
C+	77%-79%	2.33/4.00

Extracurriculars in the US



US universities offer a **wide range of student-run societies and clubs** – ex: sport teams, cultural organizations, arts groups, debating societies.



At the beginning of the year you will have the opportunity to discover all those societies at the **Student Activities Fair**.



Joining a club/society is the best way to **make new friends and get involved** in the campus life.

- Recommendation: commit to no more than **3 organizations**



Also many **volunteering opportunities** both inside and outside university.

Semester System vs Quarter System

Semester	Quarter
2 semesters, 15 weeks each	3 quarters, 10 weeks each
US default: Ivy League (HYP), MIT, UC Berkeley	Stanford, Dartmouth, UChicago, CalTech, UCLA
6 classes per semester (average)	4 classes per quarter (average)
Pros: Deep dive into course material Cons: Slow burn, less room for exploration	Pros: Fast-paced, more exploration Cons: Fast-paced, more midterms, no dead week



POST-UNIVERSITY OPPORTUNITIES

YAN CHAN

Post-University at a glance



There are a multitude of career pathways for graduates in the US, many going into **finance, law and consulting**, as well as **public services and non-profits**.



University students spend their holidays doing **summer internships** or other **volunteer projects** to explore their career interests and gain experience in their intended fields.



The US is renowned for its higher education system. No matter where in the world you want to pursue further studies or employment, a US degree provides a **global edge** and expansive enrichment.

Pathways in the US and beyond



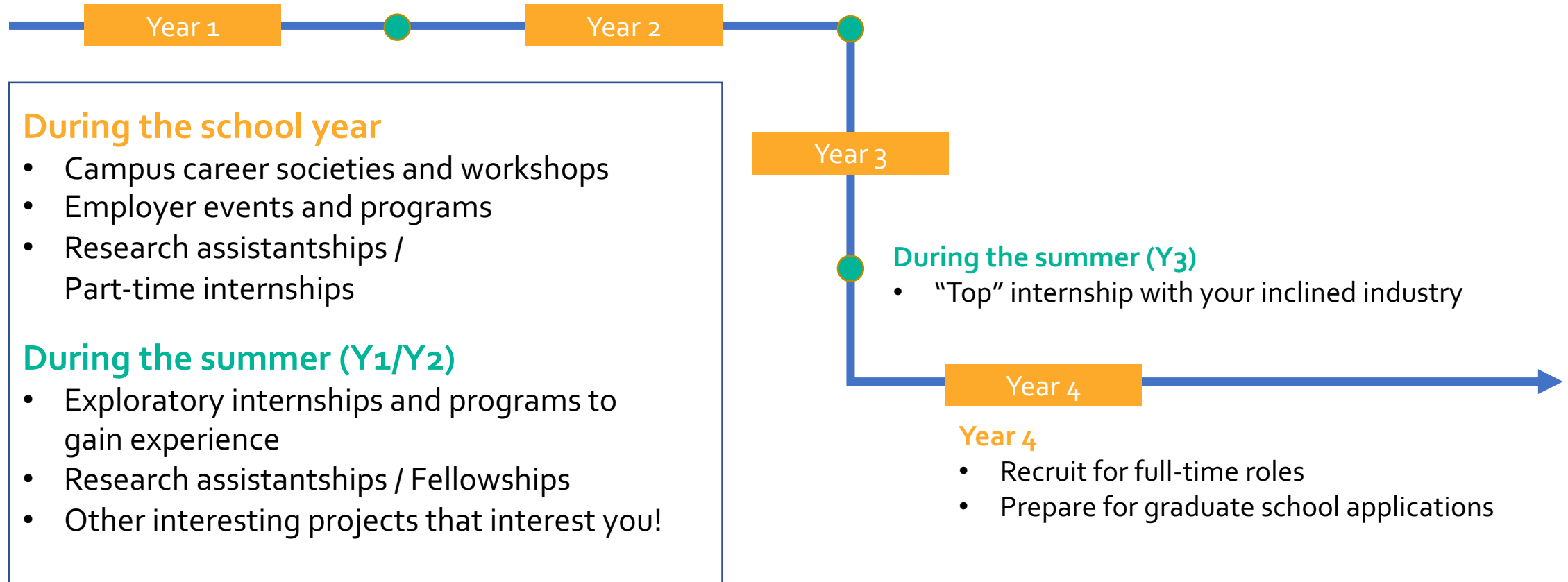
There is a **multitude of career pathways** – importantly, it is often less related to your major than one might initially think.

The most common characteristic of graduate destinations is
1) a place with lots of challenges, and
2) an international, dynamic environment.



Attending one of our target universities is **no guarantee at all!**
But... it is an enabler for many things.

Exposure to career opportunities



It is in everyone's interest that you find *your* career path, and the unis, employers and societies are there to help

A global edge in applications



For **further studies**, attending one of our target universities provides an excellent profile. You also gain better informational access to a university's graduate programs if you are an undergraduate at the institution.



Applying to **companies in the US**, attending one of our target universities provides an excellent profile. Depending on the industry, having attended a top-tier institution can strongly advance your profile to employers.



Attaining US work authorization as a foreign student may be (increasingly) difficult. Nonetheless, having a US undergraduate degree is a definite attestation to your abilities and will likely prove valuable wherever you go in the world.

Q&A



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