



APPLYING TO US UNIVERSITIES

Completing a university application is not the same as sending a friend an SMS message. You will need to follow proper punctuation, grammar and capitalization rules. Answer all of the application questions, and when you have finished, go back to double check youve answered the questions properly. Misspellings make you look really lazyespecially if you misspell the universitys name!

For the sake of uniformity, please use your ALA e-mail address for all university related e-mails as it is the e-mail you check most frequently and is less embarrassing! **Do not submit any applications until you have met with your counselor!**

Application Form

Since not all institutions use the Common Application, you may have to complete an application specific to a particular university. Before beginning an online application, you will create an account with a user name and password. Different universities require different numbers of characters and letter-number combinations, so you probably wont be able use the same user name and password for all your applications. Keep a list with the user name and password for each university, your University Board account information, and the African Leadership Academy **CEEB code (640200)**

All of this information is needed repeatedly to complete applications. Complete your online applications well in advance of the due date. In the week prior to application due dates, so many students are using the website that the system sometimes becomes overloaded which causes slowdowns and other technical problems.

Most applications require you to save at the end of each section, but for those that dont, save often so you dont lose your work. Essay questions should be completed offline as Word documents. When you are fully satisfied with what you have written, you will usually cut and paste the essay into your application. Before clicking the Submit button, ask someone whose eye for detail you trust to review what you have entered. Once the application has been submitted, theres no way to re-do it, so be sure everything is spelled correctly and the short answers as well as the essay are all intelligently written BEFORE you send the application. Speaking of clicking the Submit button, make sure you do so! Youd be amazed at how many students claim to have applied to a school but upon investigation, realize that they never hit SUBMIT! For the Common Application, you must submit both the application and any required supplements separately and before the posted deadline.

You can apply to schools in the US as early as the beginning of November. Most have a regular decision deadline of January 1st. Because of your A-Level exams and course load, all ALA students should complete their applications to US schools by December 1st. Please note that some schools have early action deadlines as well as early scholarship deadlines. Its your responsibility to notify the counselling office if you will be adhering to earlier deadlines so we can submit all the necessary information before the deadline.

Essay



The university essay can be a procrastinators nightmare. Dont put it off waiting for lightning to strike you with brilliance. Regrettably, the lightning never strikes and, with the deadline looming, you dash off a less than stellar essay. Instead, **write the essay early**. While specific directions vary from university to university, all will ask you to tell us about yourself in a well-written essay. You may have the choice of a variety of questions. Trust your instincts and choose one that feels right. With the essay, you want to show you are a decent writer and an interesting, mature person. A well-written essay can help to tip an admit decision in your favour. A dull, poorly written this is what I think they want to hear essay can keep out an otherwise admissible student. The same essay can be used for different applications if it fits the question. Make absolutely certain, if you mention a particular universitys name, you dont send the wrong essay. You wont impress the admission officer at Cornell University by telling them youd be a great addition to Cornell University! *Please see the appended tips for writing an effective application essay.*

Short Answer Questions

In addition to an essay, most applications have one or more short answer questions. Whatever the questions, be specific and interesting with your answers. Broad, vague answers are dull and have been read by the admissions officers time and time again. Make certain your answers are well written. If you have written an outstanding essay, but your short answer questions are poorly written, the admissions officer may rightly wonder whether the essay was actually your own work.

The Anything Else Question

On the Common Application and often on other applications as well, there is an optional section asking if there is any additional information you wish to add. Use this if, after looking at the entire application, there is something absent which should be added. Does your completed application accurately and positively reflect who you are? If you find something has not been included somewhere else, put it here. Examples include explaining how an illness kept you out of school for a significant length of time, or another unusual situation in your life. Speak to your counselor for details if youre unsure what might be appropriate for this section.

Extracurricular Activities

It is not necessary to mention each out-of-school activity on your application. Nor is it important to fill up every space. Concentrate on your important activities and list them in order of most-involved to least-involved. Leave out unrelated or trivial activities.

Impressive Activities and Awards

Some extracurricular activities are seen as more important than others. Here are some of the more impressive ones:

- National or Conference awards
- Student Govt, Publications involvement, etc.
- Choir, band, or drama
- Athletics
- Community Service Projects
- Student Run Business
- Unusual projects which you have initiated

Remember to Include

Side activities you have been involved with.



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Coaching or refereeing events

Music activities

Hobbies such as karate, tae kwon do.

Specific service activities and conferences you have attended.

And remember not to use acronyms unfamiliar to people outside ALA! (SRB, CSP, etc.)

Summer Activities and Employment

Most of you have had unique holiday activities or jobs that stand out. Make a list of jobs you've held. Some non-traditional jobs may need an explanation if they aren't jobs also done in the US. Be specific when describing what you've done. Don't forget to include jobs such as tutoring, physical labour, farming, family business, internships, etc. If you don't have any such experience, seek one out for this summer. It's not *required* to have summer experience, but it often helps!

Teacher Recommendations

Choosing whom to ask to write recommendations is important and is one of the things you will discuss with your counselor. The faculty at African Leadership Academy will only agree to write a recommendation if they can truthfully say something positive. These are academic recommendations in which teachers address what they have seen in class and how that predicts future university success. Some universities give you specific instructors to ask. The form may ask for a recommendation from math, English or science teacher, or someone who has taught you in the last year.

If there are no specific instructions about recommendations, consult with your counselor. If you know you will be majoring in a particular area, ask a teacher in that subject area to write for you. It is best to ask teachers you have had for at least a year, but it's not necessary to choose teachers in courses where you earned As or 6s. In fact, it's often those courses in which you earned Bs and Cs that admission officers wonder about unique circumstances that can be explained by the recommendation writer.

Ask teachers who know you, respect you, and will write positive things. If you feel a teacher has little to say other than the grades you earned or that they see you around campus, pick someone else. Also, ask the teacher in a way that he or she can politely decline. You might add, I don't want to put you on the spot, if you'd prefer not to. If your teacher replies, I'd like to help you, but maybe someone else knows you better, take the hint and ask someone else.

Do not ask several teachers to write recommendations and expect your counselor to choose the best one. Teachers are too busy to spend time writing recommendations that will never be used.

Counselor Recommendation

Your counselor is usually asked for an assessment of your motivation, academic promise, and integrity. An official copy of your transcript, your previous school transcript and an ALA high school profile will be sent to the schools you apply to. Except in unusual circumstances, a counselor recommendation is included with each application. Even if one is not requested, a letter explaining African Leadership Academy's curriculum and philosophy will be helpful. The counselor's recommendation can be used to explain weaknesses in your application, to highlight your strengths, and to explain any situations that affected your grades. The Common Application and some other university forms require the counselor to check a box if a student was involved in



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any serious disciplinary issues. If you were disciplined during high school, you will have to disclose the fact and explain the circumstances. Make certain you speak with your counselor and let him or her know what you've disclosed.

Extra Recommendations

Because you came to the Academy having attended other schools and done well there, you may be inclined to have a past teacher or headmaster write a recommendation for you in addition to your ALA recommendations. This should be okay, but remember this old saying among admission officers, The thicker the file, the thicker the applicant. The more stuff added to an application to impress the admissions officer, the more likely they are to think the student is unimpressive. Only submit extra recommendations from people who know you well and are in a position to add information not already told. This could be from the supervisor where you were a volunteer or your boss at your internship/summer job. A good recommendation has examples and anecdotes instead of empty adjectives. A few universities (e.g., Dartmouth) ask for a peer recommendation. The most important thing about this recommendation is to make sure the person writing it writes well. With peer recommendations, there is no rule saying you can't see it or help the person decide what to write. But, writing the letter for your friend is against the rules and crosses an ethical line. Some universities, such as Brigham Young University, ask for a recommendation from a non-school person such as a church or community leader. This person should not be a relative, but someone who knows you well and can contribute something not yet included in other parts of your application. If you can't think of a person to ask, see your counselor for suggestions.

Show Interest

Because universities want to admit students who are likely to enrol, many admissions offices take into account how well-informed and serious a candidate is. When a choice has to be made between two equally-qualified applicants, demonstrated interest can provide the necessary edge. How can you show your interest? Admissions officers won't welcome a flood of pointless emails, but they might keep track of thoughtful questions about academics, housing options, extra-curricular activities, and campus life. You may also want to add that you would be happy to participate in a Skype interview if at all possible. ALA is currently one of a very small number of schools that is giving this option to admission officers. When schools visit ALA, we will send out a bulletin notifying you of the time and place. Please make an effort to meet with admission officers visiting ALA it's easier for the admissions officer to send a rejection letter to someone they haven't met than to someone they have.

Remember there are no guarantees!

It is important to remember that in any university application process there are things the student CAN control (grades, activities involvement, quality of essays and application) and things s/he CANNOT control (trends in application numbers, university priorities regarding gender and geography, for example, and more). While we all must do our best to be informed and present the best possible application, we must remember that there are NO GUARANTEES and it is impossible to predict with certainty the outcome of any application effort.

Given this we will develop an open-minded, broad-reaching application strategy that includes a student applying to reach schools (those for which the student's profile may or may not be competitive, Ivy and other top institutions), likely schools (those for which the student's profile



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is most probably competitive), and safety schools (those for which the students profile is stronger than the average admitted student. We do not mean to imply that the safety schools on a students list are bad or weak institutions. No ALA student will apply to an inappropriate or underperforming university. But to ensure that students have the best chances for a range of enrollment opportunities to choose from, we will insist that students cast their net widely and not limit themselves to only a certain type of school.

It is natural to think that ones child is the best and brightest, and to want the very best education for him or her. We think the same about all our advisees, and want the best for each student. But what is best for each individual can vary widely and is a very personal determination. There are over 4,000 colleges and universities in the United States alone, and nearly 10,000 around the world. *We cannot limit our students to applying to one or two institutions, nor to only top schools , even if the student has the very strongest portfolio imaginable.*

Top institutions accept less than 10% of their applicants, and applications can number in the tens of thousands. When the applicant is an international student seeking large amounts of financial aid, the percentages decrease even further. So instead of looking for guarantees, we will look for hard work from the student, open-minded and steady support from the families, and commitment to developing the best possible application. With that combination we are confident that students will find a very successful path to follow upon graduating from ALA.

US (and other) UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE EXAMS

African Leadership Academy recognizes that the cost of testing can be high. **ALA will therefore pay for one complete test sitting for each student.** Those applying to the US can choose between the complete SAT (the SAT 1 and up to three SAT II Subject Tests), or the ACT. We will recommend that students select the ACT, as it does not require additional subject tests, for which there are additional fees and test preparation. Fees for testing undertaken beyond one ACT or one complete SAT sitting will be the financial responsibility of the family.

SAT: Students registering to take the SAT must sign up on University Board to receive a username and password. African Leadership Academys CEEB code is: **640200.**

Currently the most widely taken university admissions test, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) has three sections: Writing, Critical Reading and Math. The SAT is a three hour and forty-five minute, multiple choice exam administered at a test centre, in this case African Leadership Academy (#79660). You will need this number should your family decided to register you to take additional tests here at ALA. The exam aims to measure the verbal and mathematical abilities a student has developed over many years, both in and out of school. Each section of the SAT is scored on a scale of 200 - 800 points.

This test is made up of the following sections:

Critical Reading: Vocabulary, verbal reasoning, reading comprehension.

Math: Problems in arithmetic, algebra II, and geometry.

Writing: A 25 minute section to write an essay and multiple-choice grammar and usage questions.

The Writing Section includes a written essay which is scored on a range of 2 - 12.



SAT Subject Tests: Subject tests are one-hour and fifteen minute tests in specific subjects with a multiple-choice format, they score 200 to 800. When you register for a sitting of each subject test, you can choose to take up to three tests on a given test date. SAT Subject Tests differ from the SAT in that they measure a student's knowledge in a particular subject. Ideally, a student takes an SAT Subject Test just after completing a course study, so that the material is fresh in their mind. SAT Subject Tests are not required by all schools. Some universities do require the SAT Subject Tests, and others require a specific combination of tests. For many universities, the SAT Subject Tests are used in conjunction with SAT scores, the high school transcript, and other indicators to assess academic preparedness. A complete listing of SAT Subject Tests and sample questions is available at www.collegeboard.com.

ACT: The ACT is a curriculum-based examination and is considered by most universities to be a respectable alternative to the SAT. The ACT has four sections: English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science Reasoning. Because the sub-tests are based more specifically upon your curriculum at school, some students who have experienced less success with the SAT have found greater success with the ACT. On each section, scores range from 1 to 36 points. The composite score is the average of the four test scores. Students may take the *optional* 30-minute Writing Test as part of the ACT; most selective schools require the Writing Test. The Writing Test will offer a sub-score as part of the English Test.

TOEFL: The Test of English as a Foreign Language evaluates the English proficiency of people whose native language is not English. ALA will encourage students whose first language was not English and/or have not been instructed in English for more than four years to take the TOEFL. The exam consists of three multiple-choice sections:

1. Listening Comprehension: measures ability to understand North American English.
2. Structure and Written Expression: measures ability to recognize language that is appropriate for standard written English.
3. Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension: measures understanding of non-technical reading matter.

There are two ways to take the test: internet based or paper based. We can only offer the internet based test here in Johannesburg and we strongly encourage you to take the paper based test if it is offered in your home country.