The College Search Process
In the United States, there are over 3,500 different colleges and universities. Students are encouraged to think about all the choices available to them. Options students consider include:

College Size  Academic Interests
Geographic Location  Academic Research/Learning Style
Location Surroundings  Activities

The College Application Process
The application process is different for each college, and a student must apply to each college separately. International students may be required to submit additional items as a part of their application. Typically, an international application to a college in the US includes:

- Application Form (Common Application + Supplement or College’s own application)
- Essay and Extra-curricular Activities
- School Transcript (grades 9-12)
- SAT, ACT, or TOEFL scores
- International Financial Certification
- School Letter of Recommendation
- 1-2 Teacher Letters of Recommendations

While test scores are used for application review, colleges are less test-driven than colleges outside the US. Course grades from grade 9 – 12 are some of the most important factors in a college application.

Each college sets its own criteria for what it is looking for in an applicant. Some of these criteria are academic-related; other criteria are based on personal traits. This means it can be confusing and overwhelming when looking at all the different colleges in the US. But with research, all students will find their college “match”.

The formal college search process at NWS begins in the junior (grade 11) year. Students will work the College Counseling Office to create their application list, register for any required tests, meet with college representatives, and organize their college search.

Course Selection
NWS takes great care to ensure each student finds success in their high school years. While we know students want to begin mainstream courses as soon as possible, we also want to be sure the student will find success in these classes.

Colleges are very aware of the rigor of NWS’ international ESL program. They are aware that our students work very hard in these courses to prepare themselves for mainstream courses at NWS and in college.
Course grades are very important in the college application process, and often it is best for a student to remain in the international program and continue with their academic success than enter the mainstream program too early and struggle.

**What is a college? What is a university?**
In the American system, a college is similar to a university. The biggest difference between a college and a university is that a university is made up of many colleges; a college is usually a single, smaller, undergraduate school. In the United States, students apply to college after high school. Some colleges are a part of a larger university, but all are considered colleges.

For example, students applying to Harvard as an undergraduate are actually applying to Harvard College. A student applying to UCLA will apply to a specific college within the university, frequently the College of Letters and Science. The only difference between applying to these schools and colleges, such as Grinnell College or Colby College is that Grinnell and Colby have just one college devoted to undergraduates, so they do not use the word “university”.

A college is not considered second-rate to universities; some of the best undergraduate programs in the United States are colleges!

Graduate universities and top companies in your home countries and around the world know that American colleges are not high schools. While it is confusing that the United States uses this word differently than many of your countries so, please remember that the American system uses both of these words to mean the same thing!

**Graduate Programs**
In the United States, most students apply to a different college or university for graduate school. A student does not have to graduate from a certain school to gain admission to a graduate program. The best graduate schools want students from many different undergraduate programs in their school. So, it is frequently be an advantage to attend a different undergraduate college or university than where you do for graduate school.

**Common Mistakes for International Students**

**International Educational Agents:** Agents, while used frequently outside the US, are not used in the US. Most colleges will not work with agents during the college admission process. International students are highly discouraged from using agents.

**Essays:** While all students want to be sure their essays are well-written, students need to be careful the work remains their own. If a student’s essay is edited by too many people, college admission counselors become very wary. The college essay and all aspects of the application need to be the student’s own work and words.