

U.K. & U.S. University preparation

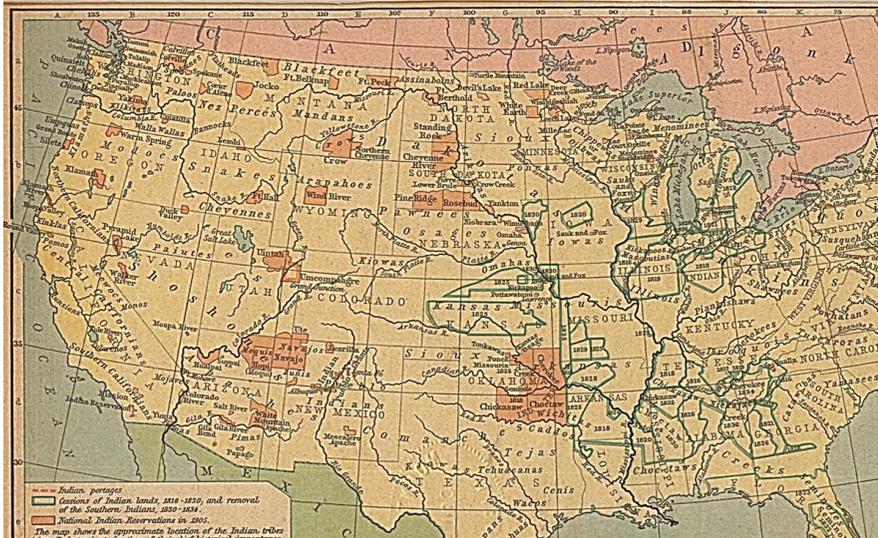
Comparisons between the two systems

Matthew Uffindell – Senior Tutor, Greene's College Oxford

Carmen Prozzillo – Principal, Greene's College Oxford



The top 20 universities (THE)



North America

2. Cal. Inst. of Technology
3. Stanford
5. MIT
6. Harvard
7. Princeton
- 10.= Berkeley (UC)
- 10.= Chicago
12. Yale
13. University of Pennsylvania
14. Los Angeles (UC)
16. Columbia
17. John Hopkins
18. Duke
19. Cornell
20. Northwestern



Europe

1. University of Oxford
4. University of Cambridge
8. Imperial College, London
9. ETH Zurich
15. University College, London



U.K. vs U.S. universities

Factors	U.K. universities	U.S. universities
Contact hours	3-19 hours per week depending on subject	12-16 hours per week regardless of subject
Subject choices	Students choose subjects at time of their application	Students choose subjects (majors) in 2nd or 3rd year
Funding	Some 'hardship' funds but few high-value undergraduate scholarships	Undergraduate scholarships tend to be more numerous, generous and varied



UCAS & The Common Application

Factors	UCAS	Common Application
Information required	Basic academic and personal	Detailed academic, personal and family information.
Extracurricular activities	Of interest, although not central to the application unless relating to area of study.	Highly relevant; colleges are looking for 'well-rounded' students – the next President!
Personal statement	Subject specific and academic; you need to demonstrate your passion for the subject, i.e. 'Why are you applying for this particular course?'	General and personal; a key area is to discuss an issue of personal concern; a typical question is: 'What would you do if you could not fail?'



A levels & SATs

Factors	A levels	SAT I	SAT II
Length	1 to 2 hours per examination	3 hours per examination + 50 minutes for essay	1 hour per subject; 3 subjects per sitting
Format	Arts subjects essay-based; other subjects involve problem sets	Multiple choice (except 11-12 grid-in questions & one essay)	All multiple choice
Credit	Credit given for methodology and the working shown	No credit is given for the working shown	No credit is given for the working shown
Scoring	'Top grades' achieved by about 25% of students who score an A or A*	25% score 1200 or above (out of 1600). Of about 1.7 m, only 300 achieve perfection	1%-8% of students gain a 'perfect' score, depending on subject



Applying to U.S. universities

Applications, tests & college counselling





July - August:
Choosing
universities

1

A possible U.S.
application timeline

1st January:
Submit
applications

7

July -
September:
Prepare for
the SAT

2

November:
Write
supplements

6

July - October:
Fill out the
CommonApp

3

October - November:
Take the SAT

5

4

October: Ask for references



Factors to consider





REACH
1450-1600
Brown
Princeton
Georgetown



MATCH
1250-1400
Carleton
Vanderbilt
UC San Diego



SAFETY
1100-1250
St. Mary's
Lewis & Clark
Mercer



Standardised tests: SAT & ACT

Why?

Standardised testing aims to ensure equitable entry requirements for national and international students to the U.S. throughout the world. Nearly 2,000,000 students took either the SAT or ACT (or both) in 2016, and numbers are rising.

Which?

The SAT and ACT used to differ considerably in style and length. However, the redesigned SAT draws the two tests very much closer. The College Board offers a table of factual comparisons between the two – and the SAT (unsurprisingly) wins!

Who?

The SAT or ACT is required for most applications – especially those to competitive colleges and universities. Subject tests (SAT IIs) may also be required.

When?

It is beneficial for most students to take the examination more than once. Tests are available in U.K. centres (SAT centres being the more numerous).

How?

Prepare! Plan ahead and make sure you spend time understanding the examinations and practising the best techniques and strategies.



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Strategy

Plan ahead: create your own timeline for applications, build a study plan, and commit to a few hours every week.

Expertise

Trust your advisers!

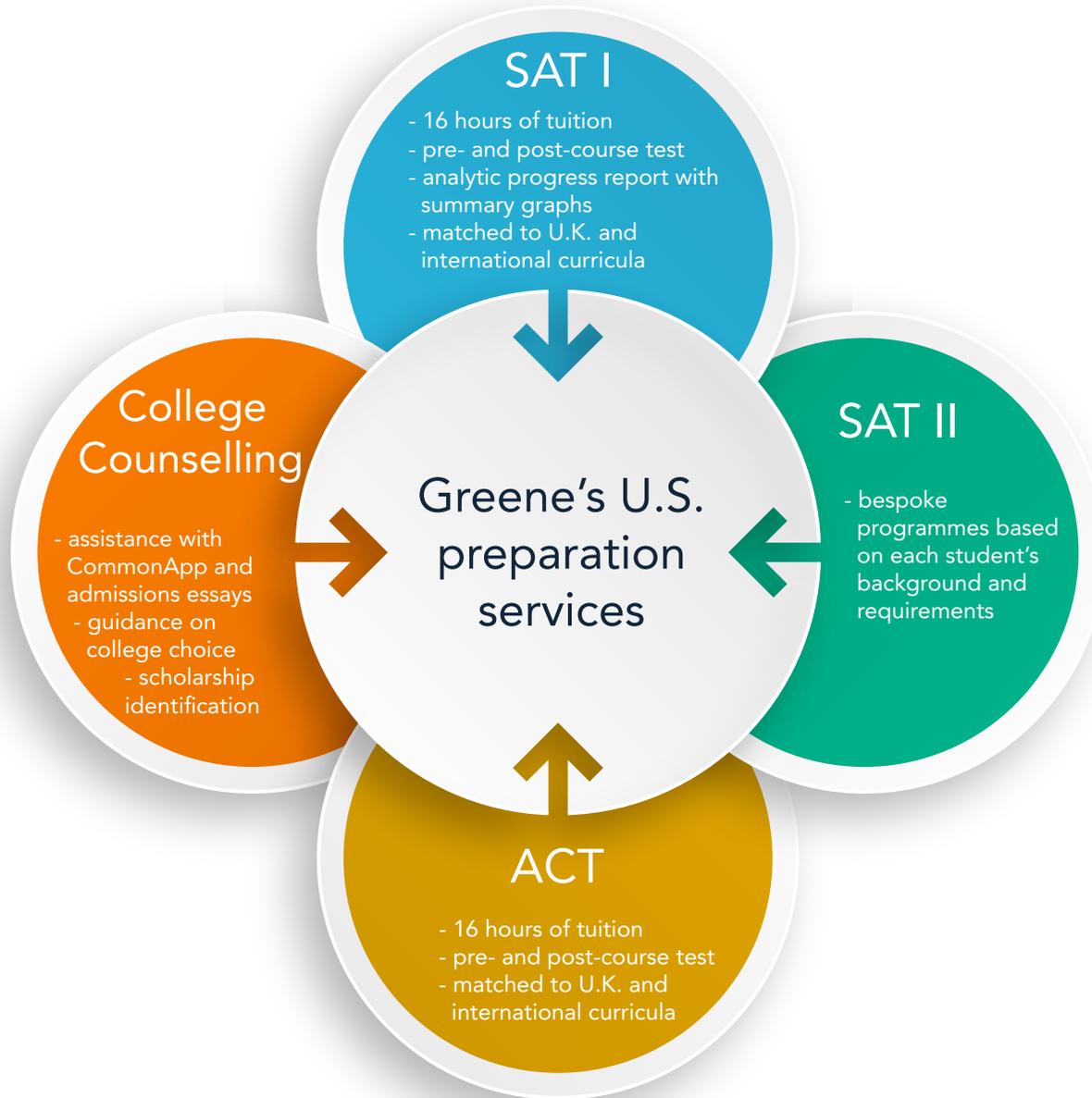
They have the knowledge and expertise to guide you through the application process.

Practice

Start working on your essays well in advance;

also make sure you adequately prepare for the ACT, SAT I and SAT IIs.





Applying to U.K. universities

UCAS, university choice, aptitude tests
& interviews





January - June

Preparing to
choose



April - November

Broadening &
deepening
knowledge



July - August

Choosing
universities, colleges
& writing personal
statements



Mid-October

Application
deadline



Early November

Aptitude tests
(if required)



December

Interviews
(if required)



Example: Oxford & Cambridge selection criteria

Selection criteria		
Academic record (e.g. GCSEs, A levels, I.B. etc.)	Yes: in context	Yes: grades & marks
Predicted grades	Yes: in context	Yes: grades & marks
Personal Statement	Yes	Yes
Relevant contextual data	Yes	Yes
School or College reference	Yes	Yes
Submitted work (as previously requested)	Yes	Yes
Pre-interview & aptitude tests (as previously requested)	Yes	Yes
Tests at interview	Yes	Yes
Interview	Yes	Yes
Subject combinations	Yes	Not specified



Personal statement hints

- a statement that is clear, concise, well-constructed, accurate and elegantly written – avoid pretentious academic jargon;
- at least 80% academic content;
- what interests you about your subject;
- evidence of your intellectual curiosity and motivation;
- subject-related work done outside school (e.g. work experience, reading, lectures);
- illustrations of your enthusiasm for, and dedication to, study i.e. explain (not simply state);
- your opinions;
- only very brief statements of extenuating circumstances – if any.



Personal statement hints II

Aim to avoid:

- waffle; untruths, repetition and clichés;
- listing your qualifications or achievements – whether or not relevant to the course;
- using more than one quotations (i.e. use your own ideas and opinions);
- using the word 'passionate' more than once, and then not without evidence;
- making statements with no qualification;
- writing about sports or hobbies too much (although a work-social balance is important).



School reference

How your school will comment on you. They may well give:

- Specific examples of your qualities, abilities and potential;
- Illustration that you are well-suited to the course and style of study;
- Evidence of intellectual flexibility, curiosity, analytic ability, logical reasoning and ability to learn quickly – even for non-school subjects;
- Confirmation you are predicted to achieve top grades;
- Your ranking order (or comparison with previous applicants);
- Reasons for any under-performance in qualifications;
- Information about recent progress or personal circumstances;
- Health or personal circumstances that might affect schooling or interviews (Cambridge has an Extenuating Circumstances Form).



Aptitude tests - alphabet soup

UKCAT

PAT

NSAA

BMAT

OLAT

ECAA

TSA

HAT

GAA

CAT

LNAT

HAA

ELAT

ASNCAA

HSPSAA

MLAT

AMESAA

MAT

ENGAA



Aptitude tests

Purpose:

- To test aptitude rather than knowledge;
- To stretch and challenge applicants;
- To assess academic potential for chosen degree courses;
- To differentiate between applicants of similar academic calibre.

Skills tested:

- Application of GCSE or early A level knowledge;
- Interpretation of data or argument;
- Critical thinking;
- Comprehension;
- Essay writing;
- Response to new material.

Methods of testing:

- Multiple choice, short answer questions, or essays.



Interviews

Do you show that:

- you are well-informed about the course?
- you have a genuine passion and interest in the subject?
- you have breadth and depth of subject knowledge?
- you have read more widely in your subject?
- you can use appropriate academic terms & language register?
- your answers are well-structured, relevant and analytical?
- you respond well to difficult questions or when pushed to explain?
- you can use inference and logic well to develop arguments?



Plan

Plan ahead: create a timeline for your application & commit to working on it consistently for a few hours every week.

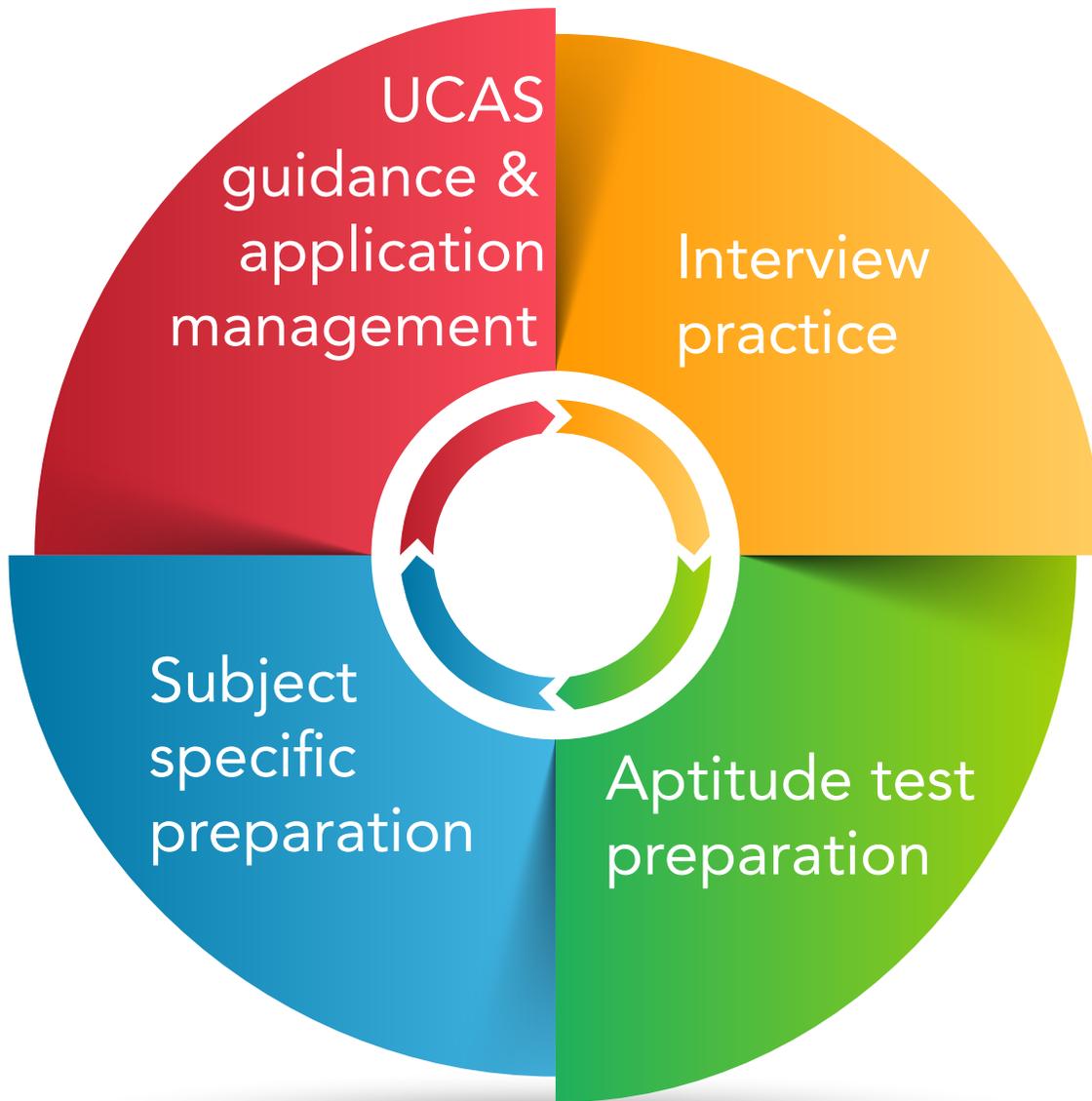
Ask & Research

There is much information available on the university websites. Ask the experts at your school for advice and direction.

Prepare

Start thinking about your application well in advance; ensure you adequately prepare for your aptitude tests & interviews.





U.K. university preparation services





GREENE'S
COLLEGE
OXFORD