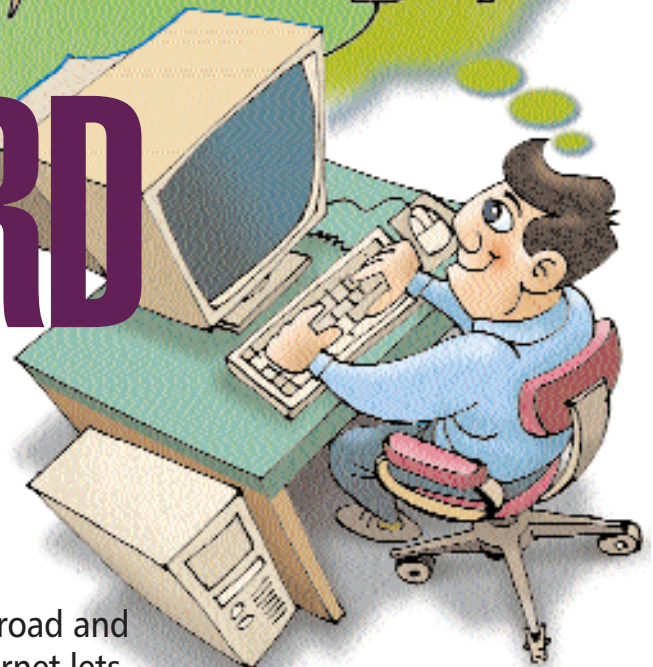




# WESTWARD BOUND



Tired of plodding along the beaten path? Go abroad and graduate from a college of your choice! The Internet lets you explore options before you take the plunge, and the exercise is not as difficult as you may think

Every year, a large number of hopeful undergraduate and graduate students in India apply to educational institutions abroad. Few are called, and still fewer are chosen. You can improve your chances of getting into the college of your choice if you plan well in advance, examine your options carefully,

and go about it in an organised manner. But how do you set about doing this?

The Internet has helped simplify the admission procedure considerably. A few years back, you had to write in for information, and the prospectus usually took a couple of weeks to reach you. You can now log into the Web sites of colleges

around the world and get information about them and the courses they offer. A good place to start would be [www.campustours.com](http://www.campustours.com) (see screenshot on next page), where you can undertake a virtual tour of schools in the United States. Of course, the best way is still by visiting the school and exploring the campus, but

this is obviously unfeasible—unless you have indulgent relatives or friends abroad who are willing to sponsor your trip.

### Apply pronto!

Application time may seem far away, but knowing how fast time flies, you should ideally start preparing a year in advance. The more time you give yourself, the better your chances of being accepted by one of your top picks. Before anything else, make sure you have the necessary qualifications. This means that you should be ready with your TOEFL and SAT (or GMAT or GRE) scores—nearly all colleges in the US ask you to provide these figures before even entertaining the idea of giving you a hearing.

If you are applying to institutions in the US, and are very sure about the college you want to be in, you could avail yourself of an Early Decision Plan, which allows you to apply early (usually in November) and get an admission decision from the college well ahead of the usual notification date. These plans are 'binding', meaning if you apply as an early decision candidate, you agree to attend the college if it accepts you and offers an adequate financial aid package.

### The search

If you already know what you want to do, you can browse the list of career categories. If you are unsure of what you want to be, you can find careers that match your skills and preferences by filling out online forms and questionnaires that are provided for self-evaluation.

Find schools that match your criteria and

**TIP**

### Back up everything

Make copies of your applications, recommendations, transcripts and essays. Keep a folder for each school you are applying to (both physically and on your computer) and file copies of all papers and correspondence. Do not delete files from your PC after you have taken printouts and mailed them. You never know what you



CampusTours lets you visit the schools of your choice

preferences. There is no one 'perfect' college. Instead, many colleges would be a fine match for every college-bound student. The trick is to home in on a few select colleges that meet your requirements. Be practical. Dreams of graduating from an Ivy League school are all very well, but if your academic achievements and extracurricular activities are not anything to write abroad about, it is wise to set your sights lower. At the same time, don't apply to that school in Alaska just because being different is 'cool'.

College applications don't come cheap. Typically, each application to a college in the US will set you back by anything between \$30 and \$75. Learn how to narrow down your search so that you apply only to schools you are really interested in.

Start with a wide search (such as location: Texas, because you have an uncle in Dallas) and then narrow your search with more criteria (such as major: Marine Biology, because you have a degree in zoology and would like to do your PhD in a related subject).

You could check out the Princeton Review at [www.review.com](http://www.review.com) for details about colleges and their rankings. Yahoo! has an excellent global list of edu-

## WHY GO ABROAD?

Why go abroad at all? Is a phoren degree from the US or Great Britain really worth an annual expenditure of 10 lakh or more? Isn't it more patriotic to graduate from an Indian university? Yeah, sure. But what one can't deny is that the academic world in the West is far more diverse, with a fusion of people, ideas, cultures, resources and programmes. Students are encouraged to gain valuable work experience while still studying something that is virtually unheard of in India. There is a choice of curriculum, and the credit system gives you greater flexibility to complete your course. The teacher-student ratio abroad is much healthier, and greater emphasis is placed on thinking for oneself than learning by rote.

Okay, so you're convinced that it's worth the price. What should be your destination? Most people assume you're off to the US when you say you are going abroad for higher studies. It is true that close to 40,000 of these overseas Indian scholars are in the US. Only about 5000 study in Britain, and still fewer in Australia and Canada. Other countries, though not hot favourites, do offer specialised courses and exchange programs and are thus worth checking out. If you are fluent in French, for instance, an

educational institutions that are catalogued by location. If you are hell-bent on graduating from Mongolia, this list will come in handy.

All educational institutions in the US have the .edu suffix. Hence, if you don't know the exact URL of a college, you can hazard a guess—you will often be bang on target. No prizes for guessing where Harvard is located on the Web. (Yes, that's right—it's [www.harvard.edu](http://www.harvard.edu).) Also, you can use the 'refine search' option of search engines like AltaVista to home in on '.edu' sites in a geographical area that you specify.

### Essays ain't easy

The essay is probably the most important part of your application. Your academic record may be brilliant, your

## HOW TO APPLY ONLINE

A growing number of schools accept 'common' applications offered by many commercial Web sites. You fill out one questionnaire and the service puts the information into the applications you specify and forwards them electronically or provides printouts, depending on the college's preference. You follow up with paper copies of your transcripts, recommendations, and the application fee.

Here are some popular online services:

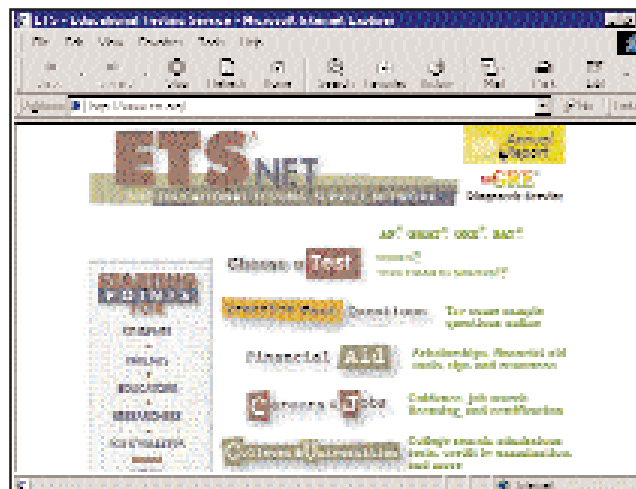
**CollegeEdge** Some 75,000 students used this company's common form last year to apply to more than 300 schools, including Duke University, New York University, and Albion College. You log on to the Web site at [www.collegeedge.com](http://www.collegeedge.com), register, and fill out the forms. The service is free to applicants; as is typical, and makes its money from the schools that participate.

**Xap** More than 200 schools, most of them in the Western states, accept applications through this Los Angeles-based service ([www.xap.com](http://www.xap.com)). The service, which works much like CollegeEdge, is free of charge.

**Peterson's** This publisher of college guides (at [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)) entered the electronic applications market only recently but already offers a 'universal application' that is accepted at more than 1,000 schools. There is no charge.

**CollegeLink** Students can apply to more than 800 schools at [www.collegelink.com](http://www.collegelink.com). First, you have to either download the application program or obtain it on a free disk. Once the questionnaire is complete, you log on to the Web site, and the information is inserted into the application forms. You get paper copies, which you send off to your schools. The first application is free, and each additional one costs \$5.

**Apply!** Students who apply using this CD-ROM service must either get hold of a copy of the free CD or download applications from the Web site ([www.weapply.com](http://www.weapply.com)) at no charge. The CD contains copies of the paper applications for more than 500 schools. Once an application is complete, you can print it out or save it on diskette to send to the school.



Sites such as CollegeNet and ETSnet give you valuable information about applying online, and include search features and prac-

extracurricular activities impressive, but your essays could determine whether you make it to that prestigious university. Get helpful advice on writing your application essay—including what to consider before you write, a detailed description of the types of questions, essay writing tips and sample essay questions.

It is not unethical to ask your relatives and friends for suggestions, provided the essays are written by you, in your own words. Neither is there any harm in mining the Net for ideas.

If you wait until you have been accepted, their grants and scholarships may already be gone. Being a non-US citizen would mean that you are automatically disqualified from applying for most college aid programs. However, there are scholarships available. Availability of scholarships and financial aid differs from country to country. It is much easier, for instance, to land a scholarship for study in the US than in Britain or Australia. Check out the details at [www.college-scholarships.com](http://www.college-scholarships.com).

If you are applying for a postgraduate

Usually, you take a laser printout of your essays to send along with your application through snail mail. If the university allows you to send your essays through e-mail, you can take advantage of this and save on printouts. Just remember to stick to specifications—if the school requests essays in ASCII text, do not send it neatly formatted in MS Word, even if you think Word does better justice to your careful formatting and layout.

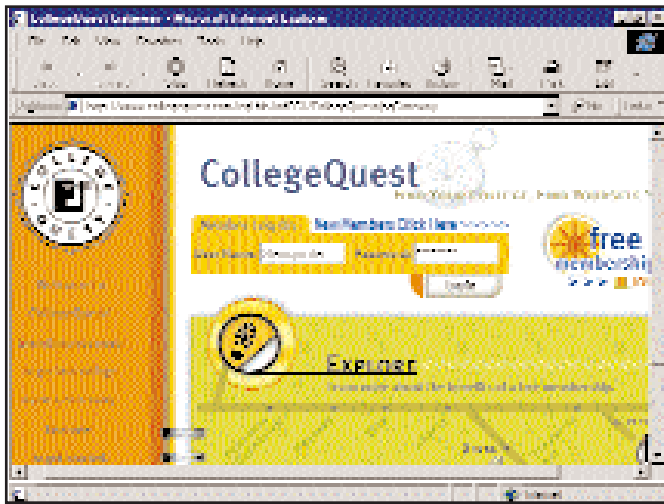
### Applying for Aid

Studying abroad is an expensive affair. The availability of aid should be a factor influencing your choice of college. Don't wait for an acceptance letter from a college before you apply for financial aid or enquire about scholarships.

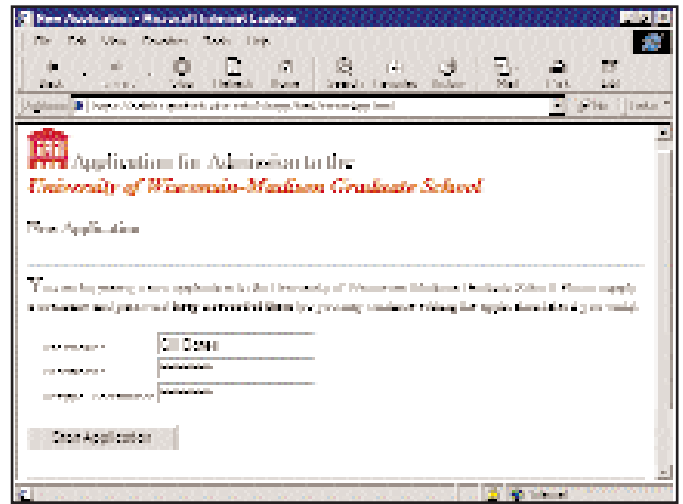
**TIP**

### Politeness never hurts

Should one send a follow-up letter or thank-you note? Well, you could send a short, politely worded e-mail to the colleges who accepted your application. The idea is not to ask them whether you have got admission, but to thank them for considering your application.



CollegeQuest asks you to register before you can request information (left); The online form to apply to Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School



or doctoral programme, and have not secured any loans or scholarships, you have the option of applying for a part-time teaching position. This will be a great help, and will prove to be a learning experience as well. A lot of independent students work part-time—at jobs that range from supermarket salesmen to library assistants—and manage to support themselves. There are sites that guide you in applying for aid, such as [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) and [www.collegeaid.com](http://www.collegeaid.com).

### The online application

Until recently, the typewriter was an indispensable piece of equipment for aspirants. This would ideally be an electronic typewriter, but even a manual one would do the job. Laser printers, which gave great results with essays, were of no help when you had to fill up complicated forms.

You don't need to rummage in the attic for a typewriter anymore. As more schools welcome electronic applications, the typed-out form is becoming more and more a rarity. In a recent survey, over a quarter of US based colleges said they would prefer an online option, nearly double the proportion of two years ago. Many colleges send out their own forms on diskettes to students, or allow applicants to complete them at the school's home page.

Despite the convenience, many students are wary of applying electronically. Some worry that the applications might not be taken as seriously and thus be

somewhat discounted. Admissions staffers insist that all applicants are given equal consideration. Some students are also concerned about placing private information on the Internet. All the commercial services mentioned here use standard security procedures, so one need not worry.

To apply to many universities on the Web (such as Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School, see screenshot) you need a frames-capable Web browser. If you are unsure whether your browser is compatible, go ahead and try the application. If you have problems, install the latest version of Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer and try again. This will definitely work.

While using this online application, remember to set your browser to accept cookies. You should also enable JavaScript and disable browser caching—because this application often redraws the screen, you ought to set Netscape or Internet Explorer to give you a new page every time, and not retrieve an old one from the cache.

### Anyone from Yale?

Log into IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and look for a room that has a topic relating to applying to colleges. You could also visit general rooms and tactfully find out if anyone has the information you require. Rooms such as #India-Bombay on TalkCity ([morechat.talkcity.com](http://morechat.talkcity.com); port 7000) will have many expatriate Indian students, the large majority of them study-

ing in schools in the US. How helpful they may be is another matter altogether.

It might be a good idea to visit 'people lookup' sites such as [www.whowhere.com](http://www.whowhere.com) and [www.batch-mates.com](http://www.batch-mates.com). It is quite likely that many people who studied with you in grade school will now be abroad. You might also try checking out alumni rosters of universities abroad to see if you can spot anybody from your part of the world. Many people respond if you send them a short, to-the-point e-mail outlining your interest in enrolling for a course.

Who knows—it may not be long before you earn a place in Stanford's Hall of Fame!

HARIKRISHNAN MENON

### SITES TO VISIT

[www.campustours.com](http://www.campustours.com)  
[www.allaboutcollege.com](http://www.allaboutcollege.com)  
[www.collegelink.com](http://www.collegelink.com)  
[www.collegenet.com](http://www.collegenet.com)  
[www.collegeguides.com](http://www.collegeguides.com)  
[www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com)