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| **[How to Create a Winning College Application](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=15faaadfeb&e=0ff4ee6706" \t "_blank)** |
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| *Applying to university is one of the most important milestones in a young Muslim’s life. The majority of the hard work is done in the 10+ years leading up to college applications and while that can’t be changed at this point, our approach to this final step surely can. No doubt, the application process can be competitive and this time of year can be extremely stressful. As Muslims, we should have high intentions, strong ambition, and an internal certainty that Allah  has a plan for us throughout this process.*  After helping hundreds of students apply successfully to college and manage the application process, I’ve included 5 tips for the productive Muslim applicant:  **1. Have high aspirations to benefit the ummah**  Our deen teaches us to have high aspiration and even [higher intentions](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=315a675def&e=0ff4ee6706). There’s no better time for a young Muslim to implement this teaching than during college application season. You should aim for the best universities, and believe that hard work will allow you to get there. You might not believe in yourself or think that you can achieve the goals you’ve set for yourself – but remember, hard work and strong intention will pay off. The power of the intention is immense, and if you intend to go to college with a righteous goal, Allah  will facilitate it for you even if you don’t fully believe in yourself.  Set your sights on helping the ummah and on going into a field which will be of benefit to people. The prophet  taught us that the best of people, bring the most benefit. As Muslims, we should be pioneers in all fields and in all professions – so don’t think you have to be a doctor just because that’s what everyone around you is doing. Expand your horizons and try something that you are passionate about. If you have a strong intention, are passionate about it, and work hard, you’ll be able to achieve great feats in any field. The Qur’an teaches us,  “There is nothing for a man but what he strives for” [[Qur’an: Chapter 53, Verse 39](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=473fc26e31&e=0ff4ee6706)]  It starts with our intention, which is developed through our planning, and is actualized by working hard. You only get one chance to do this, and it’s your chance to showcase the last decade of work. Put in as much time as possible, work night and day, give the sweat and tears, and you’ll see amazing results at the end, in sha Allah.  **2. Structure your time for your applications**  Planning is critical. Regardless of where you live, about 4-5 months before your applications are due, create your game plan. This should include a thorough list of all the schools you want to apply to, all the essay topics for each school, as well as application due dates. From there, you can backward plan and allocate your time for each application.  **But don’t forget your studies!**  All too often, students are so focused on applications that they forget academics, [causing their grades to take a tremendous hit](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=7d311ebd52&e=0ff4ee6706) and this actually detrimentally impacts a student’s admission into college.  During college application season, strategically managing your time on a daily and weekly basis will help you keep the right balance between studying and applying. The great Imam Al-Ghazali, states, “You should structure your time, and arrange your regular activities and assign to each function a set period of time…this is how to attain the spiritual barakah (blessing) in your time.”  Every day, you should have a set amount of time that you will work on your application essays. This should be balanced with your regular schoolwork, as well as a strong spiritual practice that will keep you grounded amidst the stress of college applications.  Be sure not to waste any time on weekends, and try to limit days off as much as possible during these months. Every minute you invest now will result in significant benefit later down the line. In my experience mentoring students with applications, the most successful students deactivate all social media (facebook, snapchat, twitter, Instagram, etc) and focus 100% of their energies on applications.  The human brain can only process so much information, and the more you process excess photos, images, statuses – the less time you’ll be able to devote to clear thinking and writing.  **3. Research, research, research**  Put in as much time as you can up front on researching which college you actually want to go to. Whatever age you are applying, it is a big step to try and figure out what you want to do for the next few years of your life, as well as a potential career option. The following methods will help you determine if a school is right for you:   1. Use Google to research universities that you may want to attend and create an info sheet for each university. List out what’s most important to you about each school – this will help to guide you moving forward 2. Speak to students who attend the schools you want to go to. Reach out to students and set up informational interviews. Ask them about student life, about what the culture is like, about the academics, and them give them a sense of what you’re looking for and see if it matches 3. Go sit in on courses during/watch courses online. Most universities allow you to sit in on lectures for free. Try to find courses that you’re interested in using their online catalogue and either watch them live on or online before deciding to go there 4. Visit the campus. This is really important, especially if you have the time and resources to do so. You’ll only get a feel for what a school is like if you actually go there and try to determine if you could see yourself there. Take a tour while you’re there, speak with the admissions officer, speak to random students, and get a feel for what a day in the life would be like   Researching and having a solid understanding of each university will also help you with your essays – the more information you have, the easier it will be to write a genuine essay. At this point, work as hard as you can on your essays and don’t be afraid to ask for help.  Once you feel confident with your essays, lean on friends and family to proofread and give you new ideas. Be careful not to get too many conflicting opinions, as this could result in confusion – but having a few trusted folks will certainly help.  Also, don’t be afraid to leverage professional guidance. In times like this, a little bit of up front guidance can go a long way in setting you on a good path.  **4. Work hard and leverage the secrets of our deen**  Your work ethic is super important throughout this process. At times, your motivation will slip and you will want to ask Allah  for assistance in getting through this. If you’re able to manage your time well, have strong aspiration, and work persistently, you’ll have no regrets by the end of this process. Devote a few hours a week to each essay draft and you’ll see the fruits of your labor by the time you’re done.  Sometimes you’ll have writer’s block and you’ll need an opening. Turn to Allah  and beg him for assistance. In our *deen*, there are secrets from the *sunnah* of the beloved Messenger  that will help.   1. Try not to miss any prayers or key *adkhar* during your college application season. While this should be the norm that we aim for, sometimes we fall short on our spiritual routine. During the months leading up to applications, the more in tune you are with Allah  the more assistance you’ll see. This will also help bring *sakeena* (tranquility) in your mind. 2. Ask Allah  for his help during *tahajjud* time. It has been narrated that Allah  descends (figuratively) to the lowest heaven during the last third of the night, and that all duas are answered [[Bukhari](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=03debaa4ab&e=0ff4ee6706)]. Make 2 *rakat* for success with your college applications and you’ll see huge openings in your ability to craft a successful essay. 3. Try to incorporate the [morning and evening duas](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=936794fcd7&e=0ff4ee6706) of the Prophet in your day in order to see the barakah. I know countless people that have seen amazing productivity benefits by setting aside a few minutes every morning and/or evening to these duas. These have been compiled by the erudite scholar Imam Al Haddad in his [Wird Al Latif,](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=6e78a58c21&e=0ff4ee6706" \t "_blank) and you can also follow along on YouTube. 4. Sometimes you might get stuck, and sometimes you’ll run into hardships. Leverage the multitude of duas that are narrated by our Prophet  and ask Allah for a sincere opening. Every time you’re facing a challenge, read: “اللَّهُمَّ لاَ سَهْلاً إِلّاَ مَا جَعَلّتَهٌ سَهْلاً وَأَنّتَ تَجّعَلَ الحَزَنَ إِذَا شِئتَ سَهْلاً” “Oh Allah! Nothing is easy except what You have made easy. If You wish, You can make the difficult easy.”   If you can do some of the above and keep a balanced spiritual routine during this process, you will see immense assistance, in sha’ Allah. Taking out an extra 20-30 minutes per day during specific barakah-filled times will help you structure your day and see immense benefit.  **5. Put your trust in Allah , not the admissions committees**  If you give it your all, make dua throughout the process, and do whatever is in your control, don’t be stressed at all about the outcome. Have true *yaqeen (certainty) and tawakkul (trust)* that Allah  is taking care of you. He wrote where you will attend college before you were even born and the more you remember this, the easier it will be to digest the outcome.  Don’t worry if you get rejected from what was your top choice school. Allah  says,  “And it may be that you dislike a thing which is good for you and that you like a thing which is bad for you. Allah knows but you do not know.” [[Qur’an: Chapter 2, Verse 226](http://productivemuslim.us14.list-manage.com/track/click?u=1781669808b8255ca3e7ca212&id=ddee001c09&e=0ff4ee6706)]  We should reflect deeply on this verse and internalize the meanings.  When I was applying to college, I really wanted to go to certain Ivy league schools in the East Coast. My mom was making constant dua that Allah  give me whatever is best, and I was making dua for certain schools. Of course, Allah ’s decree and mom’s duas overcame what I was hoping for, and I was a bit bummed. All my friends were going to the East Coast and I was going to be in California, going to a school not too far from my home. I tried to be grateful, but internally I was a bit disheartened.  I ended up falling in love with the college I went to, and achieved things there that I never imagined myself being able to do. I was able to get a job at a consulting firm that usually only recruits candidates from the top Ivy leagues and had amazing life transforming experiences. I was even so blessed to meet the person that I would end up marrying. As Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple once said, “You can’t connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future”.  *If you work hard, try your best to follow the advice given above, and ask Allah  for his assistance, you’ll see amazing results and benefit tremendously from this journey of applying to college. Look out for Part 2, where we’ll dive more deeply into the college application and provide tips and tricks on how to write an outstanding essay. If you need any help, please feel free to reach out to me! Have you completed your application, or are in the process of sending it? What are you tips and advice? Share them below!* |