

How to shortlist universities?

After deciding on a program and country, the next step is choosing the ideal set of universities to apply to. Multiple factors need to be considered, and they are mentioned below.

1. Curriculum

As obvious as it may sound, this is a very crucial factor. The study abroad experience does not end with an admit - in fact, it begins with an admit. If you choose a university purely based on brand value or rankings and ignore the curriculum, you will either struggle during the program or will not secure jobs in your area of interest. Your MS program should help you gain the skills you need to be eligible for the career you have planned for yourself.

2. Costs

While we have a general idea about how much it costs to pursue an MS in various countries, this factor needs to be considered during the shortlisting process as well. Typically, the top-ranked universities are more expensive than the others. Additionally, your living expenses will also depend on the location of your university because living in a major city is always more expensive than in a suburb or a small town.

3. Admission Requirements

There is no point applying to a university whose admission requirements you do not meet - for example, if a university expects a GRE score but you do not have one, your application will be marked as incomplete and will not even be considered. Universities and programs usually mention minimum expected or average GPAs, and while it is not binding usually, it should give you an idea about your chances of getting in.

4. Chances of Securing an Admit

In spite of how competitive your profile might be, universities always receive more applications than the size of their intake. For example, the NC State MS Analytics program received 661 applications for 120 seats for the Fall 2022 intake, and enrolled students' median undergraduate GPA was 3.67. Its ~20% acceptance rate is still considered fairly healthy. While an applicant should aim high and try and get into the best possible universities, shortlisting needs to be done with a healthy dose of practicality.

5. Job Opportunities

While education and upskilling is the chief reason to pursue an MS degree, the associated costs mean that most international students seek employment in their study abroad destination during and/or after they graduate. Naturally, students gravitate towards universities that offer both their ideal program and the safety net of a high post-graduation employment rate. Additionally, universities that offer good internship and/or on-campus job opportunities are preferred as they contribute to reducing the cost of education significantly.

6. Location

The location of your university matters for two reasons, usually. The first one is the cost of living, as mentioned above. The second one is the availability of jobs i.e. the existence of a big ecosystem of employers that recruit from your program and university. This factor is critical for certain programs (for eg., finance and computer science) but is not very important for others (such as healthcare). Additionally, depending on your personality, you may want to live amidst the big city hustle-bustle or may prefer the calmer small-towns or suburbs.

7. Rankings

As Indians, we are obsessed with rankings. They do matter, but not as much as we make them out to be. Hence, it is not the most important factor to consider. The quality and strength-in-depth of international education systems mean that until a certain level, all universities will provide you a great education and appropriate job opportunities. In multiple cases, students going to higher-ranked universities find themselves in the same organization doing the same job as someone from a lower-ranked one.

8. Weather

The weather, frankly, should be the least of the applicant's concern unless there is a genuine medical condition.