

For an admission to the Fall 2005(around August/September 2005) i.e. soon after my B.E. in June 2005, I had to be ready with my scores in Nov 2004(previous year). It was suggested that I start with my preparation for GRE and TOEFL right then - Feb2003 itself, since I was relatively free then. I did to some extent, but later had to concentrate on my BE. I only hope I had continued to prepare. NO REGRETS.

After the 5th semester in February 2004, I decided that it was the right time to start off with the preparation for GRE. I inquired about the courses for GRE preparation and finally joined IMS, which is supposed to have the best material for the GRE.

I personally feel, if a person is able to put in an hour of work towards GRE from February till May, then start of with the same in July after his 6th Semester exams and continue it till the end of August, that preparation is more that enough to get a decent score. GRE must be given by the end of September (maximum) in order to concentrate towards 7th semester subjects too.

The typical schedule of any student who is planning for admission towards fall semester soon after he finishes engineering.

I speak with reference to my case, i.e. FALL 2005 (Just shift the year in the information given below to suit your requirement)

Month/Year	Things to do
February 2004	Start of with GRE preparation (mainly start learning the words). Spend 1 hour for the same. Join a course if necessary. Start looking into universities Websites. Take a list having say top 100 universities.
May 2004	Halt your preparation for a while and concentrate more on your BE. Also try your level best to get placed in the first few companies that comes to your college. It gives you confidence that you are one among the best students in your college. By now the list of univs. Must reduce from 100 to say 50-60
June 2004	Book your slot to take up GRE and TOEFL right now (3 months in advance). This can be done over the phone or on the web. Leave a week gap between GRE and TOEFL. (That's sufficient). First GRE and then TOEFL.
July 2004	Soon after your exams, take a weeks break and come back to your preparation for the GRE on a better scale. Say around 3 to 4 hours apart from the time spent in learning new words. Reduce the list of univs to 10 –15
August 2004	Intensify your preparation. Start taking up Mock paper based tests towards the middle of August. Towards the end of August, start taking up Computer Based tests. This is definitely a rough indication of how much you would be scoring. Reduce the list of univs to 4-6.
September 2004	College begins. But still do GRE preparation till your exam date. Sept. 20 th to 30 th are the best dates to take up GRE. If it is possible earlier, it's much better. Take up TOEFL a week after GRE. It is only during that week you prepare for TOEFL (Barron's and ETS tests are sufficient). Don't waste your time preparing for TOEFL. I prepared for 2-3 days and got a 280/300. Send your scores to 4 univs on the day of your test
October 2004	Wait to receive your official score reports. Start preparing rough draft of SOP, Recommendation letter and Resume.

November – Dec – January- Feb 2005	Prepare all your documents and keep them ready. Start applying to universities that suit you and more importantly your scores the best. Approach a consultant if necessary. Send your application packet well before the deadline date
March – April 2005	You start receiving your I-20's. Book a visa slot right now. Start preparing for VISA interview.

Now I shall explain each one of the above in detail.

Once you have made your decision to pursue your higher studies, nothing should come in your way in your path to the same. Never listen to your friends, colleagues, professors or any person for that matter. You know what suits you the best. Your parents would definitely stand by you in this matter.

1. Start of with the GRE preparation sometime in February of the previous year of your enrollment. I.e. if you wish to join in fall 2006 start off in Feb 2005. Consult a friend or senior who has gone through this process and take guidance from him. There is no better thing as guidance from a person who has gone through all this than asking a stranger about his opinion. Various coaching centers also hold free workshops for the same. Attend every one of them and get a clear picture what path you should take. Join a class if necessary and see to that it is during weekends and that way you can finish the course in 2-3 months. If you have say 25-30 days of holidays, join a daily course. Work for atleast 1 hour during this period. You will have to start of with the preparation for verbal in a systematic way. Meanwhile brush up your basics in mathematics by going through 9th and 10th standard textbooks. Get a good newspaper like HINDU, DECCAN HERALD to read their editorial. In the process you will learn new words as well as see the way in which a topic can be presented from a critic's point of view. This also helps in knowing how to analyse a topic. This should prove very helpful in Analytical writing assessment and Reading comprehension. Also start looking into the websites of top 100 universities to know their programs, costs, requirements etc.
2. Continue this till May end. Meanwhile as the campus selection starts of try to get placed in the first few companies itself. It gives you enough confidence for the rest of the process. You will know where you stand amongst the others in your class. A few companies' tests have their questions taken from GRE material. So you get a dual benefit. But never disclose to the company officials during the interview that you have such plans. Start preparing for your exams.
3. Since our plan outlay is to take GRE and TOEFL by September end, you need to the book the test dates in June itself (3 months in advance) so that you get a comfortable date and time. This can be done online on www.gre.org and www.toefl.org. This can also be done over telephone to a New Delhi number specified in the GRE bulletin. Also apply for your passport if you don't possess one. It usually takes 45 days to get a passport.
4. Next, after exams in July take a few days break and immediately start off with a full-fledged preparation for the GRE. Spend atleast 5-6 hours for the same. Your need to learn new words, work out exercises, read passages, analyse the entire pool of the analytical writing topics, refresh your math basics etc. At around mid August around a month before your test start taking up practice paper based tests. Even though it is not on the basis of actual GRE, it does help to know where your week points are. Next around 20 days before your exam, take up the computer based tests other than the ones provided by ETS (i.e. POWERPREP). You get to know where you stand. A few tests like Kaplan, IMS etc, are very

tough and you might not get a desirable score. Don't worry about it. Whereas a few tests like the Princeton Review, Barron's tend to boost your confidence. After you are done with all the available tests, take up the ones on the ETS CD. You not only get the same conditions as that of the testing center but also the exact range of your score. Say you get a 1300 in the tests, your actual GRE score would definitely lie between 1200-1400 i.e. plus or minus 100. For instance, I got 1270 in the first test and a 1310 in the second. My GRE score was a 1240.

Also get a list of 4-6 universities to which you would want to send your GRE and TOEFL scores to. I shall describe this in greater detail a little later.

5. After you are done through your preparation go through the entire course material again redoing all the exercises and test at home as well as college. A few days of not listening to boring lectures will not do any harm to you. You need attendance as well as preparation. So work out the exercises in your class also. Maybe 3-4 days before the test stop attending college and go through the word lists, revise formulae, analyse the topics, read passages etc.
6. Take up your test on the stipulated day and time and give it your best shot. Be there almost an hour in advance as they expect you to do some paper work and formalities there. Take warm clothing, as the room might be air-conditioned. Do not think about anything else and do really well. After you finish the test you are given a choice of viewing your test scores or canceling it. If you are so sure that you have done really badly and cannot even get an 1100+ then cancel your scores. You get an idea of what your scores would be by taking more practice tests and on that day by observing the type of questions you are getting. If you are getting too easy a question then it is an indication that your score is low, You know what to do at that instant. If you think you have done really well atleast in 2 sections of the three then don't cancel your scores. It may happen that you have done very well in Quantitative and AWA and not so good in verbal you chances of a score of 1200+ are still high. Then don't cancel your test. Most universities unless very specific about verbal scores don't gauge a student on verbal ability alone. Next, after you have seen your score, you are asked to send the scores to 4 universities of your choice free of cost. Use this responsibly. I shall speak about this in greater detail a little later.
7. Then after GRE take up the TOEFL. 2-3 days preparations should do for this as most of us have been in English Medium of instruction from kindergarten. There is every chance that your score is going to be above 275 out 300. GRE verbal preparation does help to a great extent in TOEFL esp. in Reading Comprehension and Essay. Just do the 2 tests on the ETS POWERPREP CD and the whole of Barron's.
8. Then shortlist your universities by going through their websites in greater detail. Definitely look into their GRE score requirements. If your GRE score is not within their requirements it is advisable not to apply to that university.
9. After this stop thinking that you GRE and TOEFL scores are the only requirement for the universities. You are WRONG. It is only 1 out of the 10 requirements of the university. So even though a good GRE score takes you places, a not so good one will not halt your progress either. It is your academic scores, which tend to pave your way through. Your recommendation letter and Statement of Purpose have to be very good. I shall speak about this a little later.
10. Soon after you receive your official score report, you will have to start applying to the universities since the deadlines for the acceptance of applications for financial

aid start during November for top universities. By February 1, most good university deadlines would be over. So you need start preparing all the documents by October and keep them ready by November 15th atleast. Each university has its own application packages requirements. But on the whole you will have to prepare 10 –12 documents. You'll need atleast 15 copies of the same. A good consultant would assist you in the process. He might also take care of the whole application process for a fee. He would select the best universities to suit your requirements. In case you do not have time and patience to do all this by yourself you can approach such consultants like Shashi consultancy, Visu, PML Rao, etc. Some coaching centers like IMS, TIME etc. arrange workshops for preparing the documents and help you select universities. But they might not help in the application process. This would be a good option you have time, patience and things like that. But in our case since we were busy with 7th SEM exams and 8th SEM project hunting we approached consultants and they did seem to do a good job.

11. After applying, forget about this and carry on with your work. Keep checking your emails and the application status on the university Websites everyday from about February end. It is at this instant that a few universities start making their decision about the admissions. By March end to April beginning all universities would have made a decision and you would have got into 3-4 universities.
12. When you receive your first acceptance letter itself please book for a visa slot in late June or early July. Do this as a few universities expect you to join in August itself and a few as late as September end. Also take care to see that your visa interview is well before your probable date of joining of the company which has recruited you.
13. Regarding the VISA preparation and after that, I shall speak a little later as I am currently through this process. (It did not get done, but however I have a VISA experience file, mail me if you want it)

Now, I shall speak about GRE in detail.

GRE is the Graduate Record Examination conduct by the Education Testing Center, Princeton, New Jersey USA. It conducts this exam in many countries 5 days a week all through the year. It is a test for the universities to gauge a student applying to a Graduate Program. The exam is conducted in major cities in India at the Prometric Testing centers. It is situated in Bangalore on Lavelle Road.

The pattern of the GRE introduced in October 2002 is as follow. There are three major sections.

1. Analytical writing section - On a point scale of 6
2. Verbal Ability - On a score of 800
3. Quantitative Ability - On a score of 800.

1. Analytical writing section:

This consists of two parts.

1. Analysis of an Issue
2. Analysis of an argument

Each one a scored on a point scale of 6 and the average is taken to get the actual score of 6. A score of 4.5+ is generally considered to be good while a 5+ is always preferred. A low score here may not be desirable.

1. In the analysis of the issue you are presented an issue which could be a statement, saying, generalization etc. You are required to take a stand either supporting it or opposing it and substantiate your stand by giving valid reasons in the introduction. These reasons must be elaborated upon in your subsequent paragraphs. These 3 –4 points must be very striking and should demonstrate your stand very well. This should strengthen your decision and force the reader to accept what you have said. You need to give a few good and RELEVANT examples for the same. Conclude your essay by summarizing the reasons given to reiterate your stand. You're given 45 minutes for this. There is a choice among two topics.

Select the one for which you will be able to state more reasons.

In the 45 minutes duration, 5 minutes for brainstorming, i.e. to think of 11 the point. Note this down in your scratch pad. 30 minutes to write the body of the essay. 10 minutes to write the introduction and conclusion and 5 minutes to correct spelling and grammatical errors if any. This is to be done in the same order. REMEMBER that the essays are to be TYPED and NOT WRITTEN. So you need to tone your typing skills. Type out your essays on notepad only and not on word (Errors are highlighted in word). For this, read a variety of topics to get good points and examples.

2. In the analysis of an argument, you are presented a paragraph showing stating a few reasons and from that a conclusion is drawn. Usually, the reasons do have a flaw and you are supposed to highlight on that. For example, comparison between two cities A and B might be given. A few measures taken in city A might have succeeded, so the same must be applied to city B. But there will certainly be a few flaws in the same which you are supposed to highlight and elaborate upon and say why such a conclusion cannot be made. Begin your essay by stating the flaws and then elaborate each of them in a paragraph and then summarize them in the conclusion and say "if these flaws had been taken care of, then the argument would have been sound."

You are given 30 minutes for this. 5 minutes for brainstorming, i.e. finding the flaws, 15 minutes to elaborate, 5 minutes to write the introduction and conclusion and 5 minutes for spellcheck and grammar check. To excel in this section you need to be a good critic and must be able to find fault at things. If you are not one become one until the GRE test atleast☺.

I resay my statement that, this is the most important portion in the test, and through which quite a few universities gauge their applicants.

2. Verbal ability:

This is the toughest part of the test for us Indians atleast and a score of 500-550 itself can be called as a good score. Very few people get 600-650+. Aim at a decent score in this and prepare for the test.

This part has four types of questions.

- a. Antonyms
- b. Analogies
- c. Sentence completion
- d. Reading Comprehension

Antonyms are words closely opposite in meaning to the given word. You are given a word and five answer choices and asked to pick from them.

In Analogies, 3 words are given. There is relationship between the first two. You need to find the appropriate word from the choice, which has the same relationship to the third word. There are as many as 45 – 50 kinds of relationships.

Sentence completion is part where you are given one or two blanks in the sentence and asked to choose the right answer from choices.

These three types of questions need a sound vocabulary and even with that tend to see new words every time we take up a test. The only way to get a good score is to go through the entire word list in Barrons and be thorough with them. It seems simple but it is not as you think it to be. Also Norman Lewis, RosenBlum etc. have written a few vocab books from which you tend to learn 200-300 words each. Barrons has 50 word lists with around 70 words in each. A normal engineering student would know 2000-2100 words in them. It is the remaining 1400-1500 words, which we need to learn. A sound preparation must take you well beyond 600

Now coming to the toughest part of the GRE Verbal, it is the reading comprehension. You are given a paragraph and asked to answer a few question based on that. Sounds simple. Doesn't it? But dear it is not so. The topics vary from Arts and Humanities to Social Science to Science etc. You need to read between the line to answer the questions. Analyse the passage properly in order to answer the inference questions. You are also bound by a time limit and cannot spend the whole time reading the passage.

This section has duration of 30 minutes and you have 30 questions. Say 1 minute per question. But if you can quickly finish you antonyms and analogies without much thinking (imagining words are at your fingertips) you can spend more time on RC. If you get 450-500+ it is good enough to get you into universities which are ranked beyond the top 30 to say 70.

3. Quantitative Ability

This section is pretty simple for all of us who have been used to do complex calculations at the engineering level. There are questions from

- a. Arithmetic involving numbers, fractions, ratio, proportion, speed, distance and time, work and time, statistics, permutations and combinations, probability.
- b. Algebra involving surds, matrices, equations, conditional identities, indices, logarithm, factorization etc.
- c. Geometry involving lines, triangles, quadrilaterals, polygons, solids, analytical geometry etc
- d. Data interpretation in which graphs/tables might be given and you are asked questions based on that.

It is very simple to score 800 in this section with say a weeks preparation. Also on the day, just before going to the test keep working out a few problems so that that sets your brain the way of mathematics so that you do not have to start from scratch. This test is for 45 minutes. Time yourself don't rush through your answers as there are just 28 questions.

After your GRE, you get to see your scores and then forget about it. Don't bother about it thinking that it is the only thing that he universities look into.

Now about TOEFL. It is a very simple test and most universities look for a minimum score of anywhere between 213- 230 in the test. It is very easy to get a 270+ in this test.

This has four parts.

1. Listening where you listen to a conversation or lecture and are asked questions about it.
2. Structure where a sentence with an error is given. At four places an indication of error is made. Just choose the write one. The error would be a grammatical or a contextual error.
3. Reading comprehension where passages are given and you are asked questions based on it. This is very easy compared to the GRE RC and very easy to score.
4. Test of Written English (TWE) where you are given a topic and you are asked to write an essay. This topic is very simple and general compared to GRE AWA topics. It is scored out of 6. It is also called the writing section. More than the points you write, it is your grammar and spellings which take you through getting a good score.

Listening, RC each is out of 30 points. You get to see the score on the same day. Structure and Writing come combined together for 30 and on the day you are given a range say 15-28. So if you get a zero in your essay you get a 15 and if you get 6 you get a 28. Your score is also displayed as 220-280 meaning a score of 0 in your TWE gives you a 220 and a score of 6 gives you a 280.

After the test, forget about your scores, as people usually get 270+.

Now comes the most important part of your admission. The application process can be over in 20 days or might take 3 months, it all depends upon you.

There are close to 1300 universities in the United States. Among this if you get any university in the top 100 it is a good thing. So never say that I want to get into top 10-20 universities. It is just next to impossible as only Americans get into those colleges. Indians from IITs and REC and those with extraordinary scores in engineering, GRE and TOEFL get into these universities. So it is not worthwhile to apply to them.

There is no centralized system of admission to the various universities and you have to apply to each of them individually. So it is always better that you apply to 8-10 universities considering various factors to find out which suits you the best. The various factors in shortlisting of universities are given below.

1. Location (If you are very particular about a particular state)
2. Academic requirements
3. GRE and TOEFL scores minimum requirements(Check out GRE Verbal and AWA scores)
4. Fees (This is the important criterion to select the univs. Please keep in mind that you might have to pay the first year fees before getting there and obtaining an assistantship.)
5. Deadlines(A few universities have earlier deadlines, you might not have prepared your documents by then)
6. Subject of interest(Whether your subject of specialization is good at that univ)
7. Chances of obtaining assistantship.
8. University rank and accreditation
9. Strength of the faculty and their qualifications
10. Your relative in the United States might want you to come and study there in his State.
11. Climate(Whether it suits you. There's no use if you fall sick over there)

There are many documents which you will have to start preparing to submit along with your application form. Each university has its own requirements. But the general list would consist of the following.

1. 10th and 12th Scores (A few univs say that they don't need this)
2. Degree Certificate (Not a problem if you have not finished eng. You can take it with you while you are going)
3. BE Marks sheet
 - a. Photocopies of individual mark sheets attested by the college principal/ Registrar of the university.
 - b. Official transcripts obtained from the university (VTU) on the payment of a fee.

It is better to have both of these ready as a few univs require the first and a few the second. Individual photocopies do a lot good more than consolidated ones. Univs do reject people on this basis.
4. Statement of Purpose
5. Recommendation Letters 3-4
6. **Educational** Resume
7. Affidavit from you father/sponsor that he can afford your expenses in the US
8. Official GRE/TOEFL score reports(I shall speak about this a little later)
9. Bank Statement stating that you have sufficient amount in the bank to spend for your education. It is usually around 12-15 lakh or \$25,000 – 30000.

Your application packet is the most important thing as it speaks about you as they just you based only upon that and there is no one to one interview or anything of that sort. Your Recommendation letters and Statement of purpose along with your resume have to be the best and these can only guarantee you an admission. Many websites and persons might give you samples of these articles. But never duplicate them. Please be original as they have the software, which can test the ingenuity of these things comparing the same with the articles on their database. Americans are not fools. Even though the points may be the same, the way of presentation has to differ. I have seen a friend of mine who just changed the name on someone else's reco and forwarded it to the university. See, it is your future and you have to work to keep it bright and secure admit into a good univ. You need to write a convincing statement, as you know best about yourself. I shall speak to you regarding these articles a little later.

Now, actually coming to the meaning of official score reports of GRE and TOEFL. An organization by name ETS (Education Testing Service) conducts these tests. They are the only ones who have the authority over your scores and are the only ones who can provide the university with the scores. Only a score report provided by them is deemed as valid. No photocopies of the score report you received, will be accepted by the universities. So this organization charges a fee to report the test scores to each university. It is \$15 per university for one test (Be it either GRE or TOEFL). But on the day of GRE and TOEFL you are given an option of sending your scores to four universities free of cost i.e. you can save $60 + 60 = \$120$ if you are ready with your university list before giving the test. So, start shortlisting the universities along with your GRE preparation. Later, when you are applying to other universities you will have to pay ETS \$15 per university. For this you need to send a request to ETS either via mail/fax/telephone. You need to have an international credit card for the same. Please do not confuse this fee with the university application fee. That is totally different.

Next, coming to the recommendation letters.

You need to get letters from your college faculty who has been associated with you for quite sometime. Say 6-8 months. It can also be a person in an industry under whom you might have worked as a project trainee or junior. They need to speak high about you, your academics, your involvement in extracurricular activities, your goals and why they think you would be a good student to the university. It is always preferred that you get the same from an Assistant Professor or a Professor, your HOD, your principal and may be HOD's of general departments like Math and Physics. It cannot be from your school teacher or college teachers or principal.

As the recommenders may not have enough time to write out a letter, it is preferred if you could draft a letter on their behalf about yourself and show it to them to make changes and corrections. Then put it on their letterhead and get their signature and seal. Place it in an envelope and get it signed by them and sealed on the flap (The end you stick) so that it looks that it has come from the professor himself without tampering.

Make quite a few good points, which definitely not everyone could boast of. Never repeat the same points in two letters. Divide your points equally among all the letters.

Next coming to the Statement of Purpose. It is also called Purpose statement and by many other names. This is the most important aspect of your application. Please include about your project details, involvement in Extra curricular activities, about yourself etc. Begin with a general topic and then pull the same towards your candidature. Then introduce yourself and state your credentials. Speak about your academic record and say in a flowery way that it is unmatched and unparalleled. Speak about your mini-project, major project, hobby projects details and how they changed the person in you. Speak about your goals and ambitions. Tell why you want that university and that subject. Also say how the university would benefit from you. Also say what you would do with an MS degree. Also speak about your role in associations in your college and your association with the various college fests if any.

Next coming to your resume it should supplement your SOP in all respects. It should be an educational one and not a professional or a job-seeking resume. Highlight your projects, scores, teaching experiences etc.

Bank statement to be obtained from them manager of your bank that you have around \$25000-\$30000. This is important once your application is accepted and the university is ready to issue an I-20 to you. Unless you show that you are financially capable it is not possible for the univ. to issue you an I-20. If you have that amount in your A/C show it. Otherwise approach the manager explaining your situation and he might help out. Or approach a financial consultant for the same. They charge around 1% of the total amount. This is not that important at this stage until you show them the required funds.

Speaking about universities. There are 1300 universities in the US. So, an admission into the top 100 universities is very good. An admit into top 50 is even better. There are three categories of universities you should apply to.

1. **Ambitious:** These are the top 20 universities, which may accept you but not very sure and they are usually expensive, and favour IITians and NITians from India. You could apply to say 2 universities in this category. But never expect to get in. If you have high expectations you might only end up getting disappointed. Universities like MIT, Stanford, Cornell, Purdue, Univ of Texas – Austin, Columbia university, Carnegie Mellon university, Georgia Tech, Texas A&M etc come under this category.

2. Right universities: Very good universities in say the top 30-70. The universities whose score requirements are satisfied by you. They have good admission rate. They are apt for Indians like us financially too. The university to which your admission must not be a problem unless for some specific reason. You could apply to 4 universities in this category depending on your score. The universities like Arizona State University, Univ of Florida, Virginia Tech, Univ of Colorado – Boulder, Univ of Massachusetts – Amherst, Univ of California (at quite a few places), Polytechnic University – Brooklyn, State University of New York (SUNY) – Buffalo, Stony Brook, Oregon state University, Michigan State University, University of Texas – Dallas, University of Missouri – Rolla, etc. come under this category.
3. Sure shot ones: slightly low ranked universities which come handy in case you don't receive any admit among the above to categories. They have high acceptance rate, low fees but they are ranked slightly lower close to top 70-100. You could apply to say 2-3 universities in this category. Universities like Univ. of Texas at Arlington, Illinois Institute of Technology, University Central Florida, Wayne State University, Univ of Missouri – Columbia, Kansas City, University of Louisiana – Lafayette, Louisiana State University etc come under this category.

I am speaking of these universities with respect to a GRE score of 1200-1400 and B.E. aggregate of around 75%+.

Coming to the university selection, the total fee mentioned on the website is an indication and you don't spend the same. It is usually lower. There are three parts usually.

1. Tuition fee (which you need to pay) – This would be waived if you get assistantship. People usually get partial fee waiver or out-station fee waiver. Outstation fee waiver is usually done as we pay more than the US citizens. When you get such a waiver, your tuition fee is the same as US citizens. This is usually around 12,000-15,000\$ per year for most universities.
2. Living expenses – These are the expenses for accommodation, food, travel etc. They indicate an amount assuming you stay on campus. But staying on campus is usually expensive, So it is better to share and apartment close to campus. This would bring down your expenditure to 1/4th of the estimate. Also cooking your own food is better. You could live within \$50-60 for your food per month. Other you need to spend \$15-20 per day for food. So you should be able to manage with \$300-400 per month, which comes to a maximum of \$5000 per year. On the website \$12000-15000 may be mentioned. This can be taken care of by us, by doing jobs for upto 20 hrs a week getting paid \$6-8 per hour. So you would effectively be earning for your living.
3. Misc expenses – Like books, insurance etc. Comes upto \$2000.

After your selection of universities and the documents are ready, apply online to the universities, as it is faster and more reliable. Send in your supporting documents by DHL University express courier or any other reliable courier. They usually are less than Rs.1000 and take 3-4 days to reach them. This is pretty important. While applying online, you need to use your credit card to make payment for application fee which is around \$30-\$75. Your application cannot be processed till they receive all your documents and the payment. They acknowledge the receipt of your application packet either through email or snail mail or both and notify the missing documents if

any in the package. They ask you to make it available to them. This should be done by Jan end.

By Feb end to March beginning, universities start processing the applications and start notifying their decision. Usually the universities that are low ranked and need students inform you of their decision. The good ones make their decision by April middle to May beginning. Then you receive your admission acceptance letter accompanied by another important document called I-20. This states your course details, fees details, joining date etc. Check if your name on the I-20 matches with the one on your passport. If not inform the graduate office immediately and they usually issue you a new I-20 with the corrections. Once you have received one admit, please block your VISA date for June end or July beginning as getting dates later is very tough and you'll be put to tremendous tension.

Your admission status can be found online for most universities. If the university is taking long time to make a decision, it means that you are being considered and that is a good sign. Reject letters are sent earlier.

Then after receiving your I-20's and reject letters start preparing for the VISA process which is a long one but the outcome of which is desirable.

For the VISA process, begin with the supporting documents first as they take more time compared to the educational documents.

Start off with your personal funds in SB accounts and FDs first and see to that it comes upto to a lakh and a half more than the amount mentioned on the I-20. So if your I-20 states 25000\$(11 lakh) show around 12.5 lakh in your account and FDs. This is very important. Next show access to second year fees by showing the amount in the bank account or FD if present. Else show your parents/sponsors annual income. It must be around 4-5 lakhs. Show jewellery, shares, LIC bonds, UTI stuff etc. To show that you are coming back to India as your roots are over here show your land and property to show that you are financially sound and heir to the properties.

This VISA process is a pretty long procedure and becomes another file of 4-5 pages. I have just briefed about the outline. A detailed file is in the making.(However it did not get done. I have my VISA experience with me though. Let me know at Lakshminarayan.r AT gmail.com if you want the same.)