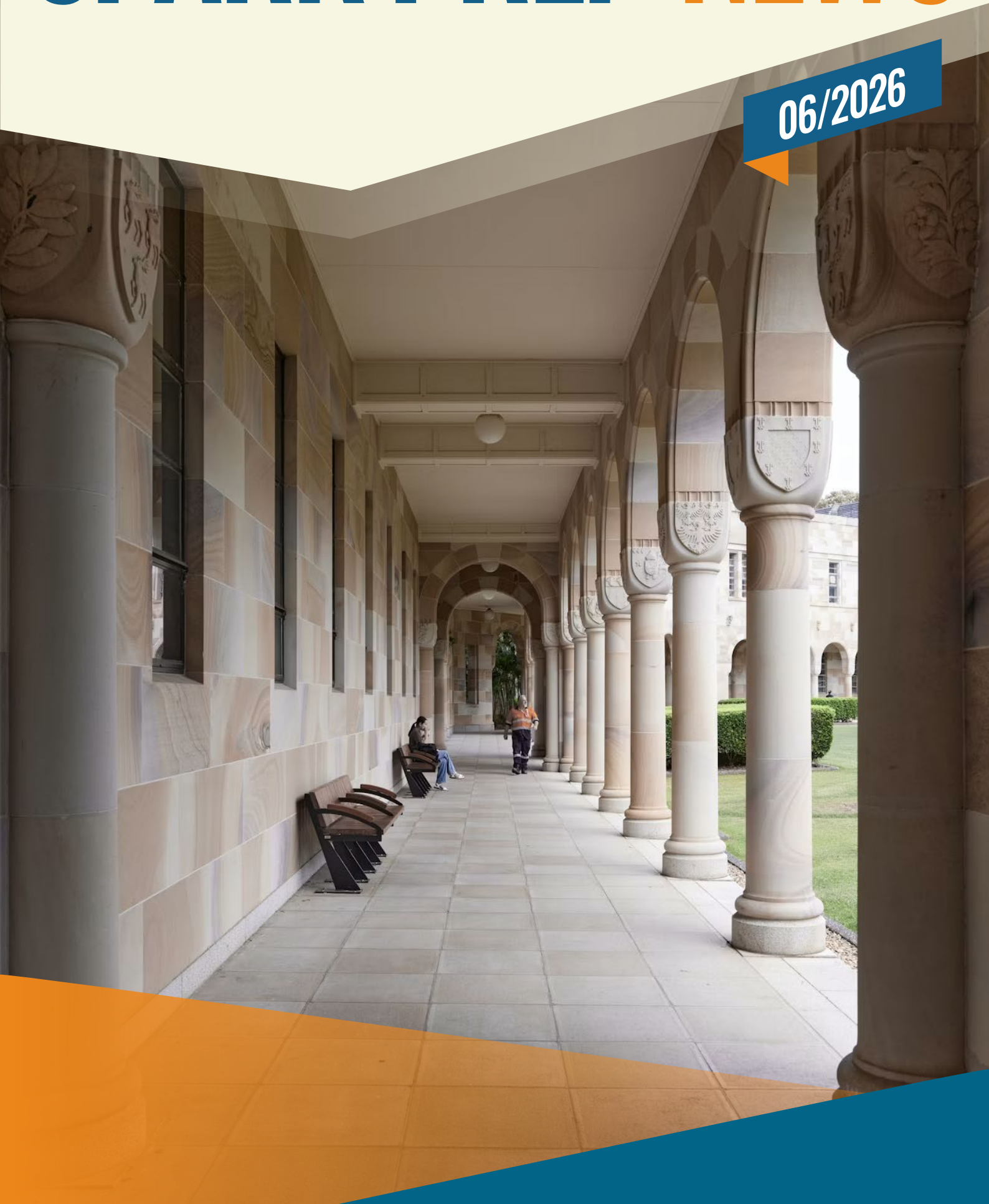


SPARK PREP NEWS

06/2026





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THE JOURNEY OF A FREEMAN SCHOLAR: EARNING A FULL SCHOLARSHIP TO WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY

Analyze the 6 'puzzle pieces' that make up the profile of a #13 LAC college admission."



14:30 - 16:30
Thursday, 25/06/2026



Online via Zoom



Featured Speakers
Thu Ha

*Freeman Scholar,
Wesleyan University,
Class of 2030*



Tran Nguyen

*Head of Admissions
Planning - Spark Prep*

Featured Speakers

Le Thu Ha

Freeman Scholar, Wesleyan University, Class of 2030.

A graduate of Lam Son High School for the Gifted (Thanh Hoa, Vietnam), Thu Ha is one of only 11 students across Asia selected for the prestigious Freeman Asian Scholarship at Wesleyan University, receiving a full four-year scholarship worth more than VND 2.7 billion annually.

Tran Nguyen, M.S.Ed.

Head of Admissions Planning, Spark Prep

Master of Science in Education (Global Higher Education), University of Pennsylvania

As Thu Ha's admissions strategist and application advisor, Tran Nguyen worked closely with her throughout every stage of the admissions journey.

This was not another admissions workshop filled with generic advice or one-size-fits-all application tips.

Instead, this webinar was an opportunity to hear the authentic story behind a remarkable admissions journey, from the earliest aspirations, through moments of uncertainty and challenge, to the unforgettable day an acceptance letter finally arrived.



At the event, Thu Ha and Tran shared:

- ▶ The real story behind an application that resonated with Wesleyan University's admissions committee. Not because of an impressive list of achievements, but because it reflected an authentic student with genuine values.
- ▶ The biggest challenges throughout the application process, and how they were overcome step by step.
- ▶ What made Thu Ha's essays stand out, and the journey of discovering and developing those stories.
- ▶ Practical insights into building a thoughtful college list and pursuing highly competitive merit scholarships, from both the student's perspective and the admissions advisor's strategic viewpoint.
- ▶ Advice for students outside major metropolitan areas who may have fewer resources but want to maximize their chances of admission to highly selective universities.

Most importantly, attendees had the opportunity to ask Thu Ha and Spark Prep's admissions experts their own questions. Whether they're wondering about essays, school selection, scholarships, extracurricular strategy, or any part of the college admissions process, our team would be happy to share insights drawn from decades of combined admissions experience.

The webinar was designed for:

- ▶ Grade 10-11 students who are wondering, "What should I start preparing now?" to build a stronger application in the years ahead.
- ▶ Grade 12 students who are currently refining their applications and would benefit from practical insights and first-hand experiences before the upcoming admissions season.
- ▶ Parents who want a clearer understanding of the college admissions journey and how to best support their children throughout the process.

Watch the event recording at:



ADMISSIONS RESULTS





STUDENTS CASE STUDY

THU HA

A compelling college application does more than answer the question, "Who am I?" It also needs to answer something just as important:

"If I become part of your community, what will I bring to it?"

That became one of the biggest lessons in Thu Ha's application journey.

As a student at Lam Son High School for the Gifted, Thu Ha had a strong academic foundation and a clear passion for the social sciences. She was also deeply involved in community initiatives, leading projects that engaged thousands of young people across Vietnam.

But when applying to some of the most selective universities in the United States, strong academics and meaningful extracurriculars alone were not enough. The real challenge was finding what would distinguish her from a pool of equally accomplished applicants, each with impressive achievements and compelling stories.

The Biggest Challenge

In the early stages of her essays, Thu Ha naturally focused on sharing experiences that meant the most to her. The stories were heartfelt, rich in detail, and genuinely meaningful.

Yet something essential was still missing.

Admissions officers are not only interested in what has shaped you. They want to understand how those experiences have changed the way you think, and more importantly, how that perspective will enrich their campus community.

The Turning Point

Throughout her coaching journey with Spark Prep, Thu Ha gradually shifted her mindset.

Instead of asking,

"Why do I want to attend this university?"

she began asking a much more powerful question:

"If I'm admitted, what kind of community member will I become, and what value can I contribute?"

That shift transformed the way she approached college research.

Instead of stopping at rankings or academic programs, she explored the classrooms where she wanted to learn, the student organizations she hoped to contribute to, and the research opportunities and communities where she could continue making an impact.

As a result, every "Why Us?" essay became more than a statement of interest. It became a thoughtful vision of how she saw herself learning, growing, and contributing within each university community.



What helped elevate Thu Ha's application?

- ▶ Building a cohesive academic identity centered around Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, and her sustained commitment to community engagement.
- ▶ Conducting in-depth research on each university to create a genuine two-way fit, connecting what she hoped to gain with what she could meaningfully contribute.
- ▶ Developing the habit of independent revision before receiving coach feedback, strengthening both her writing and her ability to reflect critically on her own work.



The most valuable outcome wasn't simply writing stronger essays. It was gaining a much deeper understanding of the value she wanted to bring to every community she becomes part of.

Key Takeaways from Thu Ha's Application Journey

- ▶ When writing a "Why Us?" essay, don't just explain why you want the university. Show why the university would be excited to have you as part of its community.
- ▶ Look beyond rankings and academic programs. Student organizations, research opportunities, campus culture, and institutional values are often where the strongest connections are built.
- ▶ Meaningful experiences should do more than help you discover who you are. They should also help you envision how you'll contribute to your next community.

The most selective universities are not simply looking for exceptional students. They are looking for people who will learn, collaborate, and make distinctive contributions to their campus communities.

For Thu Ha, the application process was about far more than finding the right university.

It was an opportunity to answer an even more important question:

"What will I bring to the place where I truly belong?"

Congratulations, Thu Ha, on your outstanding admissions results, including acceptances to five top universities this admissions cycle, highlighted by the prestigious Freeman Scholarship, a full four-year scholarship at Wesleyan University.

STUDENTS CASE STUDY

PHUC KHANG

From Demonstrating Ability to Demonstrating Impact

One of the most common misconceptions among engineering applicants is that the more technically sophisticated their projects are, the stronger their application will be. Many students pour their energy into building increasingly complex projects, hoping their abilities will speak for themselves.

Phuc Khang once thought the same way.

With an outstanding academic record, a 1560 SAT score, and a deep passion for Data Science and Statistical Science, Khang had built an impressive portfolio of technical projects that showcased advanced analytical thinking and strong quantitative skills.

But as we began working on his applications, an important question emerged:

What are admissions officers really looking for? The complexity of your project, or the person behind it?

The Biggest Challenge

In the first drafts of his essays, Khang naturally focused on explaining how his projects worked.

He described the predictive models he built, the algorithms he chose, and the data analysis pipeline behind each project. Every explanation was technically sound and thoughtfully presented.

Yet something important was still missing.

The reader could understand the project, but they still didn't fully understand the person who had created it.

The Turning Point

One of the most meaningful shifts during Khang's journey with Spark Prep came when he stopped centering his story around "What did I build?" and began asking a different question:

"Why did I choose to build it?"

Rather than simply describing a disease prediction model, he reflected on what sparked his interest in public health challenges and why he believed data could help address real societal needs.

Instead of writing only about datasets and algorithms, he began writing about the people behind the data and the real-world problems he hoped technology could help solve.

That shift gave his application far greater depth and authenticity.

His technical achievements remained impressive, but they were now connected to a larger purpose.

What helped elevate Phuc Khang's application?

- ▶ Developing a cohesive personal narrative at the intersection of Data Science and real-world social challenges.
- ▶ Learning to transform technical projects into stories about curiosity, purpose, and meaningful impact.

- ▶ Carefully evaluating university options to find the best fit for his academic interests, financial considerations, and long-term goals.
- ▶ Preparing for interviews as genuine conversations rather than memorizing polished answers.



Perhaps the most valuable outcome wasn't completing another ambitious project. It was learning how to communicate the significance of his work in a way that others could understand, connect with, and remember.

Key Takeaways from Phuc Khang's Application Journey

- ▶ Technical expertise matters. But the ability to explain your ideas with clarity, purpose, and accessibility is just as important. A compelling application doesn't simply prove that you're capable. It demonstrates how you hope to use your abilities to solve meaningful problems.
- ▶ Even if you're passionate about engineering or technology, don't shy away from the human side of your story. Curiosity, communication, ethical thinking, and a genuine desire to create positive impact often distinguish outstanding applicants from technically strong ones.

The admissions process is about more than proving you're qualified for admission.

It's an opportunity to connect your strengths with the broader challenges facing communities and society, and to show how your education will enable you to make a meaningful contribution.

For Phuc Khang, that became the defining lesson of his entire application journey.

Congratulations, Phuc Khang, on your outstanding admissions results, including offers from seven leading universities this admissions cycle!



STUDENTS CASE STUDY

GIA KHANH

From a Resume of Achievements to a Story That Truly Resonates

A strong GPA, a competitive SAT score, and an impressive list of extracurricular activities. Does that automatically make an application stand out?

Gia Khanh found himself wrestling with exactly that question.

He had a solid academic foundation, a clear sense of the fields he wanted to pursue, and a wide range of meaningful experiences. Yet as we worked on shaping his application, one question became increasingly important:

What will actually make an admissions officer remember me?

The Biggest Challenge

Gia Khanh's challenge was never a lack of accomplishments. If anything, he had too much to talk about.

His early essay drafts tried to fit in every activity, every award, and every experience that mattered to him. The result was comprehensive, but it often read more like an expanded résumé than the story of the person behind those achievements. The information was there. The connection wasn't.

What the essays lacked was a clear perspective that allowed readers to understand who Gia Khanh was beyond what he had accomplished.

The Turning Point

Throughout his coaching journey, Gia Khanh gradually shifted from asking,

"How can I include everything I've done?"

to a much more meaningful question:

"What do I want readers to understand about me?"

That change transformed his writing.

Instead of trying to cover every achievement, he focused on specific moments that revealed how he thinks, learns, and grows. Small experiences became powerful because they captured genuine curiosity, setbacks, reflection, and personal growth.

His essays were no longer simply about AI, mathematics, or a long list of extracurricular involvement.

They became stories about the mindset behind those interests and the way he approaches the world.

What helped elevate Gia Khanh's application?

- ▶ Building a focused academic narrative around two core fields that genuinely reflected his long-term interests, rather than trying to pursue every possible direction.
- ▶ Choosing depth over breadth by investing in meaningful experiences that developed real expertise instead of accumulating activities.



- ▶ Learning to write through "Show, Don't Tell," using vivid moments and concrete experiences to reveal his character, values, and growth.
- ▶ Connecting seemingly unrelated interests, including painting, gaming, football strategy, and mathematics, into a multidimensional story that felt authentic and uniquely his own.

Perhaps the biggest transformation wasn't in the application itself.

It was in how Gia Khanh came to see himself.

Rather than trying to become the "well-rounded" applicant he thought universities wanted, he realized that highly selective institutions aren't looking for students who do everything.

They're looking for students who know what genuinely drives them and can articulate the perspective only they bring.

Key Takeaways from Gia Khanh's Application Journey

- ▶ Don't try to fit every achievement into your essays. A single story with depth will often leave a far stronger impression than a long list of accomplishments.
- ▶ What makes an application memorable isn't always an extraordinary achievement. Often, it's the way you weave together your interests, experiences, and values into a story that feels cohesive and unmistakably your own.
- ▶ Universities aren't only evaluating what you've done. They also want to understand how you think, how you learn, and how you've grown through those experiences.
- ▶ The college application process is about more than preparing for university.

It's an opportunity to better understand who you are, what truly matters to you, and the kind of impact you hope to make in the future.

For Gia Khanh, it became the journey of discovering the one story that no one else could tell.

Congratulations, Gia Khanh, on your outstanding admissions results, including acceptances to four leading universities this admissions cycle!

STUDENTS CASE STUDY

THAI ANH

From an Application with Untapped Potential to a Strategic Admissions Journey

Not every successful applicant begins the admissions process with a perfectly mapped-out plan.

When Thai Anh first started working with Spark Prep, he already had a clear sense of the academic fields that interested him. But that was only the starting point. Like many students, he was faced with a much bigger question:

How do you transform your experiences into an application that truly convinces admissions committees?

The Biggest Challenge

Thai Anh's challenge was never a lack of experiences or ideas.

The real challenge was figuring out how to connect those experiences into a cohesive personal narrative, one that reflected his aspirations and carried genuine depth.

At the same time, he had to balance a demanding school schedule, major exams, and the constant stream of college application deadlines.

There were periods when exams inevitably slowed the writing process. His first essay drafts also went through multiple rounds of revision before the right direction emerged.

It's a situation many applicants encounter, and one that requires both patience and a clear strategy.

The Turning Point

Rather than trying to tackle everything at once, Thai Anh and the Spark Prep team focused on building a structured, step-by-step process.

Each stage had a clear objective:

- ▶ Finalizing a balanced college list.
- ▶ Developing a compelling activities profile and résumé.
- ▶ Crafting a strong Personal Statement.
- ▶ Completing supplemental essays one group at a time.

During the busiest periods of the school year, the timeline was adjusted to prevent burnout. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the entire application, Thai Anh learned to break the process into manageable milestones.

Whenever an essay became particularly challenging, he worked closely with his coach to brainstorm ideas, develop outlines, and revise drafts collaboratively.

Perhaps the biggest shift came when he realized that great essays aren't about documenting everything you've done.

They're about understanding the experiences that have shaped who you've become.

Rather than listing accomplishments, he dug deeper into the motivations, lessons, and reflections behind his choices.

As a result, his essays became more focused, authentic, and distinctly personal.

What helped elevate Thai Anh's application?

- ▶ Shaping his Personal Statement through multiple rounds of brainstorming, reflection, and revision.
- ▶ Refining his activities profile and résumé to highlight the experiences that carried the greatest meaning and impact.
- ▶ Continuously evaluating and adjusting his college list to align with his goals and an evolving admissions strategy.
- ▶ Learning how to approach different types of supplemental essays, from brainstorming and structuring ideas to telling more compelling stories.

Key Takeaways from Thai Anh's Application Journey

- ▶ Don't wait until you've found the "perfect story" before you start writing. Most great essays evolve through multiple drafts, thoughtful feedback, and continuous revision. The earlier you begin, the more time you have to discover the story that truly matters.
- ▶ Stay committed to consistent progress, even during the busiest times of the school year. Even the strongest students can struggle without a realistic plan to balance academics and college applications. Good time management doesn't just reduce stress. It creates space for better thinking and better writing.
- ▶ Your college list doesn't have to be set in stone from day one. A strong admissions strategy remains flexible, adapting as you gain new information, refine your priorities, and better understand where you'll thrive.

A successful college application isn't built over a weekend.

It's the result of hundreds of thoughtful decisions, steady progress, and continuous reflection over time.

For Thai Anh, the admissions process became much more than assembling an application.

It was a journey of gaining clarity about who he is, what truly motivates him, and the future he hopes to build.

Congratulations, Thai Anh, on your outstanding admissions results, including acceptances to nine leading universities.



STUDENTS CASE STUDY

NAM KHANH

A College Application Isn't a Collection of Essays. It's One Story Told Through Many Different Lenses.

Every university asks different questions.

Each supplemental essay comes with its own prompt, its own focus, and its own expectations. It's easy to assume that every essay is a separate assignment that needs a completely new answer.

But as Nam Khanh progressed through his application journey, he discovered a much more important question:

How do all of these essays, each responding to a different prompt, come together to tell one coherent story about who I am?

The Biggest Challenge

Like many applicants, Nam Khanh had to complete dozens of supplemental essays across multiple universities. The challenge wasn't simply the volume of writing. It was maintaining a consistent identity when every university seemed to ask something different.

One school wanted to know about his academic motivation. Another focused on community engagement. Others asked about leadership, career aspirations, or intellectual curiosity. If each essay answered the prompt in isolation, the application risked becoming a collection of disconnected pieces.

After all, admissions officers read essays one by one, but they evaluate the person behind the entire application.

The Turning Point

Rather than falling into the familiar cycle of receive a prompt > brainstorm from scratch > write an entirely new essay, a process that often leaves students exhausted and creatively drained, Nam Khanh stepped back and asked a much bigger question:

"When an admissions officer finishes reading my application, what do I want them to remember about me?"

That question became the foundation for everything that followed. His main essay was developed first, serving as the backbone of the entire application. From there, every supplemental essay was designed not to repeat the same story, but to expand it. Each essay revealed another dimension of the same person.

By the time admissions officers reached the final page, they didn't just know what Nam Khanh had accomplished. They understood how he thinks, what drives him, and why he makes the choices he does.

What helped elevate Nam Khanh's application?

- ▶ Investing significant time in refining his Personal Statement, résumé, and portfolio before diving into supplemental essays.
- ▶ Building every essay around a consistent central message instead of treating each prompt as an unrelated writing exercise.
- ▶ Adapting his storytelling so that every supplemental essay introduced a new perspective rather than repeating information already shared elsewhere.



- ▶ Continuously revising the entire application throughout the admissions season to ensure every component evolved together and reinforced the same overarching narrative.

The greatest achievement wasn't simply finishing dozens of essays.

It was creating an application in which every component spoke the same language and reinforced the same story.

Key Takeaways from Nam Khanh's Application Journey

- ▶ Don't think of each essay as a separate task. Think of your application as a book, where every essay is another chapter that reveals a different side of the same authentic person.
- ▶ Invest deeply in your master essay from the very beginning. A clear central narrative makes every supplemental essay easier to write and far more compelling.
- ▶ When you've finished your application, ask yourself one final question: "If an admissions officer had to describe me in just three words after reading everything, what would those words be?" If the answer is clear and consistent, you've likely built a cohesive application.

The strongest applications leave behind more than memorable essays. They leave behind a memorable person.

For Nam Khanh, discovering the common thread that connected every part of his story became the defining breakthrough of his entire admissions journey.

Congratulations, Nam Khanh, on your outstanding admissions results, including acceptances to seven leading universities.

STUDENT & PARENT REVIEWS

Mrs. Hanh



Thu Ha's Parents - Wesleyan University

A warm thank you to the entire team at Spark Prep. Your energy, dedication, sincerity, and unwavering commitment have guided, supported, and empowered our child through a journey filled with challenges and uncertainty. This meaningful outcome is not only a milestone for our family, but also our heartfelt expression of gratitude for everything you have done along the way.

Thu Ha & Ngan Ha



Wesleyan University

A heartfelt thank you to the Spark Prep team for steadfastly supporting both of our daughters, Ngan Ha and Thu Ha, throughout their journeys. Over the past eight years, Spark Prep has grown tremendously, yet the values, care, and quality that define the organization have remained unchanged.

Their paths were far from easy. There were obstacles, setbacks, and moments of uncertainty along the way. Yet today, both daughters have earned significant scholarships from two exceptional institutions that offer far more than an education. They offer the opportunity to grow, to transform, and ultimately, to change the course of a life.

Our deepest appreciation goes to the entire team, especially An Nguyen and Tran, for standing by Thu Ha every step of the way. Thank you for your guidance, encouragement, belief in her potential, and for always being there when it mattered most.

We remain profoundly grateful for everything Spark Prep has done and will continue to be proud supporters of the team and its mission for many years to come.

Thai Anh



Throughout my application journey with Spark Prep, the most challenging part was undoubtedly writing my college essays. Beyond that, however, the process felt much more manageable thanks to the incredible support I received. The team was always available to answer my questions, making sure I never felt overwhelmed or lost while navigating such an important stage of the application process.

The achievement I am most proud of is my Essays. Creating a truly compelling and authentic essay took time and effort. Together with my coach - Viet Anh, I spent countless brainstorming sessions exploring different ideas before finally discovering a story that genuinely reflected who I am. Looking back, it was one of the most rewarding parts of the entire journey.



STUDENT & PARENT REVIEWS

Phuc Khang



Purdue University

The most challenging part of my application journey was definitely the essay-writing process. Since I applied to nearly 20 universities in the U.S., managing multiple deadlines while continuously reflecting on my experiences and identity felt incredibly overwhelming. At the beginning, I was still uncertain about my academic interests and future direction, which made it even harder to craft a compelling story about who I was and what I wanted to pursue.

My coach - Joon played a pivotal role throughout that process. From brainstorming ideas and refining essays to helping me recognize my strengths and clarify my goals, the support went far beyond application guidance. What I appreciated most was that Joon helped me understand what I was truly working toward and why it mattered. Through those conversations, I gradually gained a clearer sense of direction and the confidence to complete every part of my application on time.

Looking back, what makes me most proud is not any single acceptance letter, but the way I pushed beyond my own limits throughout the journey. At the same time, I was preparing for the SAT and IELTS, participating in extracurricular activities, conducting research, and managing college applications. There were many moments when the workload felt exhausting, but I remained committed to my goals and learned how to stay disciplined even under pressure.

Perhaps the most valuable outcome was the personal growth that came with the process. Before applying, I often felt uncertain about the future and wasn't entirely sure what path I wanted to follow. Today, I feel far more confident in my decisions and much more resilient when facing challenges.

For students beginning their own application journeys, my advice is simple: start early and invest time in understanding yourself. Many students believe a strong application is built solely on achievements and awards, but I have learned that knowing who you are, what matters to you, and being able to tell your story authentically is often far more important.

I would also encourage students not to be afraid of stepping outside their comfort zones. There will inevitably be moments when you feel overwhelmed or question whether you are good enough. Yet those very moments often become the experiences that shape you the most and help you grow.

Having the right mentor can make an enormous difference. Joon was demanding in the best possible way. He constantly challenged me to think more deeply, define my goals more clearly, and take my aspirations seriously. As a result, I became more decisive and far less uncertain about my future direction.

Beyond essays and applications, Joon also helped me prepare for interviews, explore career paths, and build the confidence needed



to thrive in an international academic environment. At the same time, Tran and Hien provided invaluable support with developing my school list and identifying extracurricular opportunities that aligned with both my profile and long-term goals.

Having mentors who truly understood my strengths, weaknesses, and aspirations saved me an incredible amount of time and helped me avoid feeling lost throughout the application process. In the end, the most meaningful thing I gained was not simply a collection of admissions results. It was the confidence, self-awareness, and clarity to move forward with purpose toward the future I want to create.



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