

Pre-Business Guide

Introduction

When AOs evaluate applications from students who want to study business, they're largely looking for students who have been exposed to different verticals in business (marketing, accounting, finance, product design and management), AND understand critically why the BBA (Bachelor of Business Administration) is the right fit for them *beyond*, "I just want to make money."

Top undergraduate business programs care most about two critical factors in your application: (1) tangible impact and leadership demonstrated by solving a need in your community (bonus points if you're able to make a profit), and (2) academic excellence in advanced math/quantitative courses such as AP Calculus (particularly if you're interested in finance).

Note that many Ivy+ universities do **not** offer undergraduate business degrees—they offer Economics because their curriculums are rooted in exploring and studying the liberal arts. Only two Ivy+ universities, Cornell and UPenn, offer standalone undergraduate business degrees. Economics, as taught at institutions like UChicago, is a theoretical social science that utilizes rigorous mathematical modeling focusing on the "why" behind market systems. In contrast, a BBA is a functional pre-professional degree that prioritizes the practical execution of business operations through specialized concentrations like accounting or marketing.

Academics

- **Math:** Honors Algebra II followed by AP Precalculus followed by AP Calculus AB/BC
 - If school offers IB curriculum, IB Math AA Higher Level (HL) we encourage IB Math AA HL by senior year.
 - AP Statistics or Data Science elective, if offered, but not as important as Calculus.
- **Economics:** AP Microeconomics/AP Macroeconomics (or IB Economics Higher Level)
 - IB Business Mgmt or Principles of Business are generally considered electives that are less academically challenging. They're fine as electives, but not a substitute for core classes.
- **Computer Science:** AP Computer Science Principles and/or AP Computer Science A
- **English:** AP English Language/AP English Literature (or any writing-intensive humanities)
- **Optional Electives** (*if offered at your high school*): Accounting / Finance / Marketing / Entrepreneurship / Principles of Business

Helpful Note: Course rigor matters most in the context of what your school offers. AOs will look for students who take the hardest relevant track available at their school.

Extracurriculars

Nationally and internationally-recognized:

- **Business/Leadership:** DECA, FBLA, Business Professionals of America (BPA), Model UN
- **Investment/Finance:** Investment Club, Stock Market Club, Economics Club, Wharton Global Youth, any economics-based research programs
- **Entrepreneurship/Build:** Entrepreneurship Club, Coding Club, Robotics (FRC/FTC), building an app, Startup Club
- **Pitch and Innovation Competitions:** Diamond Challenge, Conrad Challenge, Blue Ocean Competition, local pitch nights and hackathons

Ideas that Count:

- Reselling business (eBay), online store (Shopify/Etsy), or service business (e.g., detailing, tutoring, photography)
- Student-led nonprofit initiative (nonprofits that present a clear mission and measurable outcomes are often more compelling). Note that you are not encouraged to incorporate this officially as a 501(c)(3)–AOs do not care!
- Financial literacy workshop series for middle schoolers or even for your high school peers
- Student-run event series (speaker night, college/career fair, community fundraiser)
- Create a process improvement or social media growth plan for a local organization that is committed to a cause that matters to you
- Build something like a newsletter that goes out twice a month to your peers on a topic that you're passionate about

Helpful Note: AOs don't care if your idea or activity is "big." In fact, "big" is relative to each institution, subjective, and ultimately vague. It will be more compelling if whatever you're presenting in your application is something real and you provide the evidence from outside sources to back it up (anecdotal evidence in recommendation letters, news articles, video supplements).

Recommendation Letters

Best: (1) AP Calculus AB/BC, (2) AP English Language/Literature, and (3) AP Macro or Microeconomics (if taken)

Helpful Note: The maturity level that a student shows in their Grade 11 and Grade 12 classrooms is closer to the maturity level they will display in a college classroom. AOs want to read about behavior that most likely reflects the behavior you'll display as an undergrad student.