

Case Study: From Liberal Arts to Columbia Engineering (3/2 Pathway)

Strategic Academic Planning in Action

Student Profile

- 1 High-achieving student with strong quantitative interests
- 2 Intended focus: Economics with exposure to finance and data
- 3 Open to interdisciplinary pathways (not locked into a single track early)

Starting Strategy

Rather than pushing for a direct admission into a highly selective engineering or Ivy League program, we made a deliberate strategic choice: enroll at Claremont McKenna College, build a high-performance academic record, and preserve flexibility for advanced pathways (including combined plans). This approach prioritized academic confidence and GPA strength, access to rigorous coursework, and long-term positioning over short-term prestige.

Execution: What the Student Did

Academic Performance

- 1 Near-perfect GPA (one B, all remaining grades A)
- 2 Strong performance in quantitative coursework

Course Rigor & Alignment

- 1 Econometrics (core requirement)
- 2 Advanced corporate finance (quant-focused research)
- 3 Quantum field theory (high-level theoretical discipline)
- 4 Psychology & history (broad intellectual development)

Behavioral Patterns (Key Differentiator)

- 1 Consistent, high-discipline study habits
- 2 Regular use of academic resources (e.g., leadership institute study environment)
- 3 Willingness to prioritize long-term goals over short-term social trade-offs

Strategic Outcome

The student was accepted into a combined 3/2 engineering program with Columbia University, majoring in Applied Mathematics, and will earn dual bachelor's degrees (Claremont McKenna + Columbia Engineering).

Why This Outcome Matters

- 1 Combines liberal arts depth with technical engineering training
- 2 Builds strong analytical and quantitative capability
- 3 Direct access to New York's finance and quantitative job markets

- 4 Alignment with careers in investment banking, quantitative finance, and data analytics
- 5 Student thrives at initial institution and transitions into an Ivy League environment with proven capability

Key Insight for Families

Most families focus on where a student starts. The real strategy is where a student can perform at the highest level—and what doors that unlocks next.

The CollegeWatch Approach

- 1 Design multi-year academic strategies
- 2 Prioritize student development first
- 3 Identify pathways most families don't know exist

Final Result

- 1 Thrived academically
- 2 Developed strong intellectual discipline
- 3 Leveraged a strategic pathway
- 4 Earned admission to a top engineering program

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