

# **YOUR JOURNEY TO COLLEGE**

## **Designing Your High School Curriculum**



Creating a high school program that will demonstrate who you are and what you will bring to the college campus can be confusing and challenging at times. It is important that you begin as early as possible to choose courses that represent your greatest strengths and demonstrate your ability to excel in the most challenging courses you are capable of doing well in. If you are a strong student and have the opportunity to take high school credit courses in grade eight, it is recommended that you do so as long as you can do well in these classes. Keep in mind that these classes will go on your transcript and will become part of the grade point average that will be recorded on college applications.

As you choose your classes each year, try to take courses that are considered “college preparatory classes”. The following information offers valuable course selection information and helpful suggestions that will assist you with designing an appropriate high school curriculum:

It is advisable to complete a math program through Algebra II & Trigonometry, if possible. This will include Integrated Algebra & Geometry. If you are an accelerated student and can continue through Introduction to Calculus or Calculus, it is looked upon favorably.

College admission officials prefer to see students complete lab sciences. Examples of lab sciences: Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry and Physics. If the high school offers courses such as Advanced Placement Environmental Science, this is considered a strong choice as well.

The continuation of foreign language study is recommended for students who can do well in that curriculum. Continuation through Advanced Placement or College level language classes is a strong choice. It is also looked upon favorably if a student chooses to study two languages or more.

If you have the opportunity to take Honors level, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses at your high school and can do well on this level, it is a strong indication to college admission officials that you have the necessary skills to succeed in a collegiate forum. School counselors are asked to rate the rigor of a student’s program on the forms that accompany your transcript and taking courses of this caliber will constitute a strong program. You can choose to take a number of advanced level classes or choose to take a course or two in an area that you excel in. Do not feel, however, that it is mandatory to take this level of class to get accepted to a good college. These courses are expected at the highly competitive level college, but there are many colleges where a strong high school program does not necessarily include these classes. The

key is to challenge yourself in a curriculum that you enjoy and can do well in. It is also preferable to get a slightly lower grade in an advanced level class rather than a higher grade at an easier level.

You can also choose to take challenging electives such as college level courses in elective areas that are academically based such as computer science, creative writing or an introduction to psychology. Those elective choices are considered more rigorous than others.

If you enjoy performing music or if you are artistically talented, it is considered advantageous to continue study in these programs for all four years. If Advanced Placement classes or entry into a Symphonic Band or Orchestra program is offered and available, college admission representatives also see this as a positive trend on a student's transcript.

If your high school offers a research based science and technology program and you have an interest in that area, the program is considered a strong choice. This gives you the opportunity to form connections in the field and enter prestigious competitions to showcase your efforts.

If you have not had the opportunity to take advanced level classes in high school, many local colleges offer a program where high school students can complete college level classes on their campus. This is another opportunity to demonstrate your ability to do well in a college level class. You can forward the grade from this course to the colleges you are applying to as well.

The key to designing a curriculum that represents the best of who you are involves succeeding in the most challenging coursework you can while maintaining a balance in other areas of your life. It is important to enjoy a healthy social life, spend time with family and friends and take part in activities you enjoy. It is also essential to use your high school experience to explore electives and options in order to determine what you do and do not enjoy, which is valuable information for you as well.