

A Planning Seminar for Parents of Students Taking Visual and/or Performing Arts Classes



Hunterdon Central Regional High School Counseling Services

The first question students must answer:

**Do I want to make a career (major in) out of the Performing and/or Visual
Arts?**

Or...

**Do I love the Performing and/or Visual Arts but plan to pursue a career in
something else.**

The Balancing Act: Choosing High School Courses for College Success

High school freshmen, sophomores, and juniors are beginning to think about signing up for courses for next year. As they ponder whether to take German or Spanish, chemistry or earth science, keep in mind that their choices today will matter tomorrow.

Building a foundation

"Choices made as a freshman and sophomore could affect choices for the rest of the student's life," says Kristin Crouse from ACT media relations.

What students study now forms the foundation of their education. Doing well in Algebra 1 will help students succeed in Algebra 2 and in even more advanced math courses. Taking an honors English course as a sophomore or junior will help them do better in senior English, write better application essays, and even influence their success in a college freshman English composition class.

In addition to preparing students for college level work, taking solid high school courses makes students more competitive in the college admission process.

"Admission committees primarily focus on the strength of curriculum taken and performance within that curriculum," says Donald Hapward, director of admission at South Dakota School of Mine & Technology (SD). "Grade point average and class rank and usually SAT or ACT results are considered third or fourth."

So what do I take

The best preparation for college work—and college admission—is a challenging curriculum that's heavy on "core courses." Core courses are the basics: math, science, English, social studies, foreign language.

"Pick courses that keep the most options open," says Shaun McElroy, director of college counseling at Escuela Campo Alegre, The American School in Caracas, Venezuela. "Push to take the highest level in math and English that you can handle, as these will serve you best."

For juniors, it can be tempting to slack off once they've taken the number of core courses required for high school graduation; they should not give into this temptation. Their competition in the selective college admission game, are taking that extra year or two of foreign language or that senior-year advanced chemistry elective.

"Try and max out with four years in all the academic core areas, as this gives you the best breadth of options," says McElroy.

Although core courses are the most important, choosing electives wisely can also make a difference. Electives provide an opportunity for students to follow their passions and round out their education.

- If you're concerned about the environment, take an extra earth science or environmental studies course.
- If singing is your first love, take a music theory course or try learning to play a musical instrument.
- If you're fascinated with cars, get some hands-on experience by trying a course in auto mechanics.
- If you'd love to own your own business someday, take accounting or other business-oriented classes.
- If you rush home every day to update your personal Web site, take advantage of any available electives in computers (actually, all students should take whatever computer courses may be available at their school—in nearly every field of study, computer literacy is a big asset.)

What colleges look for

Many college-bound students want to know what college admissions counselors are looking for when they evaluate college applications. We have compiled a list of the top qualities college admissions officers look for in prospective students.

- Challenging high school curriculum.
Most colleges require a minimum of 16 Academic Units
Counselors are asked: How does this applicant's course selection compare to the demanding schedules of other college preparatory students in their school?
Selective colleges ask: How many AP courses does your school offer? How many has the applicant taken?
- Grades that represent strong effort and an upward trend.
- Solid scores on standardized tests (ACT and SAT).
- Passionate involvement in a few activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative.
- Letters of recommendations from teachers and counselors that give evidence of integrity, special skills, positive character traits and an interest in learning.
- Special talents or experiences that will contribute to an interesting and well-rounded student body.
- A well-written essay that provides insight into the student's personality, values and goals.
- Enthusiasm in attending the college (Demonstration of Interest).
- Work and community service experiences that show dedication and responsibility.
- Demonstrated intellectual curiosity through reading, school and leisure pursuits.

A Selective College* with a minimum 20 Academic Unit Requirement

(*Selective colleges are defined as, those colleges that accept less than 50% of their applicants).

We believe that students should prepare for college by mastering certain subjects and skills. Students should demonstrate proficiency in the areas described below by taking Achievement² and Advanced Placement tests.

In summary, we recommend:

- the study of English for four years: close and extensive reading of the classics of the world's literature;
- four years of a single foreign language;
- the study of history for at least two, and preferably three years: American History, European History, and one additional advanced history course;
- the study of mathematics for four years, including the particular topics described;
- the study of science for four years: Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, and preferably one of these at an advanced level;
- frequent practice in the writing of expository prose.

Various important secondary school subjects, such as art and music, are not specifically mentioned in our recommendations. The omission of these subjects should not be interpreted as a value judgment. We are concerned only with secondary school subjects for which we have data that suggest they are specific prerequisites for college work.

Keeping a balance

“Everyone gets in somewhere ... no one gets in everywhere ...”

The very best college applicants have made outstanding grades in the toughest core courses available at their high school. It takes a very strong student indeed, to make straight A's in an all AP or honors line up and still have time for friends, family, activities, and sleep. Students need to beware of overburdening themselves; they'll do themselves no favors if they sign up for a ridiculously difficult schedule.

"Do not take tough courses solely for taking tough courses," says McElroy. Students should consider "how hard do you work? How hard are you willing to work? How else do you spend your time? If you have a job or play varsity athletics or volunteer a lot, it might be better to take two or three advanced courses and excel in everything."

Juniors should also take their college search into account. Many experts advise students that the college search and application process takes as much time and work as another class.

The high school counselor, and teachers, can help students figure out a good balance of what is challenging—but not too challenging. If students are not sure about whether they should take a particular course they should ask the teacher how much work the course will involve. If they are taking three AP classes in the fall, for example, it may be smart to wait until spring to take that advanced physics course taught by the hardest grader in the school.

"It's always better to start off slowly and speed up later than to overburden yourself and regret it," says John Boshoven, counselor for continuing education at Community High School (MI) and director of college counseling for Jewish Academy of Metropolitan Detroit. "If you think you want to take all the hard classes to look better later, remember that doing poorly in hard classes gives you no advantage."

A mid-semester reality check may be in order if students are having problems keeping up. "Generally, if students are really struggling to get a B or C, they should think about dropping down a level or making some other change," says Amy Thompson, college and career counselor at York Community High School (IL). Before students sign up for a particularly heavy course load, they should talk with their counselor about their options, before they find themselves overburdened in the fall.

Trust yourself

The school counselor, teachers, and parents can add valuable insight to students who are making decisions about scheduling courses. Students should trust their own interests and instincts, but should also listen to the advice of these individuals in regard to their strengths and weaknesses. This advice should be considered when students are making decisions on course scheduling.

"We encourage students to be as realistic as they can," says Thompson. "They know themselves better than anyone else, so they have to decide how much challenge they can handle."

The Art of Choosing a College: Tips for Performing and Visual Arts Students

Students who wish to study performing or visual arts have some unique challenges and options during their college search. Students considering a major in music, art, dance, or drama should read on for some advice from the experts.

A Difference of Degree

Prospective arts majors have two degree options: a bachelor of arts (BA) degree with a major in the arts and a bachelor of fine arts (BFA) for artists/performers or a bachelor of music (BM) for musicians. The BA degree is the typical liberal arts degree--students who major in English, history, and other humanities majors also earn BA degrees. The BFA or BM degree is more focused and intense.

"There is a world of difference between a BA in music and a BM in music," says Anthony Celentano, school counselor/military advisor at Pope John XXIII High School (NJ), who holds a BM and MM (master of music). "A BA in music will be pretty much like any other BA degree--lots of courses outside of your major with approximately 12 or so courses in your major. That's not a lot of music for the student who is looking for an intense musical experience. A BM in music essentially is a professional degree. Within my 120+ credits for my BM, only 36 were liberal arts courses. The remainder were music or degree-related courses: private lessons, conducting classes, music history, music theory, etc."

Which degree students choose depends on their college and career goals. If they have a high degree of commitment to their art, and desire an intense often competitive college experience, a BFA or BM might be right. If they would rather study a variety of subjects along with their arts major, a BA may be the way to go.

Types of Colleges

Visual and performing arts students have several types of colleges to consider. Conservatories and stand-alone arts schools offer an immersion-type experience for students earning BM or BFA degrees. All of the students you meet at this type of school will be artists, and the atmosphere is often highly competitive.

Some larger universities offer BFA/BM degrees as well as BA degrees in the arts. You may find somewhat self-contained music or arts schools within the larger university. In this atmosphere, students can pursue the more specialized degree while still keeping the door open to taking a few liberal arts courses (which would be unavailable at specialized music or arts schools). In addition, a university-based arts program might give students the option of pursuing a double degree, such as a BM in music and a BA in history (a double degree would require more than four years, however).

The Application Process

In addition to completing a typical college application, students in the visual or performing arts should prepare a portfolio or audition. Each arts program has different requirements, so you should contact the schools as early as possible to obtain their portfolio or audition requirements.

Although the portfolio or audition is an important part of the application, arts programs do consider academic record and test scores.

"Some [colleges] place greater value on academics, while others lean more toward the student's portfolio or audition," according to a workshop on arts programs presented at several NACAC meetings (compiled by Kavin Buck, UCLA; Jane Buckman, Cornish College of the Arts; Ed Schoenberg, Otis College of Art and Design; and Jenny Woo, UCLA). "Most colleges balance the student's creative talent with their academic achievements."

Assessing Your Abilities

For students interested in pursuing an arts major and career, now is the time to seek objective opinions of their abilities in the field.

James Gandre, Dean of Chicago College of Performing Arts, Roosevelt University (IL), offers this advice to young musicians: "In addition to asking for honest advice and evaluation from high school ensemble and private teachers, students can get outside assessment from musicians at a local symphony, dance company, theatre, etc. Of course, everyone doesn't live in a big city, so this may require driving one to two hours or more to get this advice, but it's worth it."

Visual arts students can receive portfolio evaluations and college information at one of the National Portfolio Days sponsored by an association of arts schools and art departments at universities. The National Portfolio Day is an opportunity to meet representatives from fifty-two of the nation's leading art colleges and universities. All participating institutions are National Portfolio Day Association members and offer professional programs accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. Representatives from these institutions will travel to the Maryland Institute College of Art to review artwork, discuss educational and professional goals, and share information on art programs, careers, admissions, and financial aid. This event is free and open to the public. For more information students should speak with their guidance counselor or art teacher, or visit <http://portfolioday.net/>

Other Considerations

All students benefit from visiting the colleges that interest them and asking questions about academics, student life, and other facets of college life. Art students may have different or additional things to consider.

Location

The location of the chosen college may be a more important factor to arts students than to students in other majors.

"There may be many factors to consider when choosing where to study," notes the workshop authors. "For art students, these should involve access to professional venues such as museums, galleries, theaters, and concerts. Also, do these venues attract regional, national, or international talent to inspire and educate the students? Additionally, the opportunity to perform, exhibit, and have active internships is vital to a young artist's education."

Facilities

In addition to checking out dorm rooms, classrooms, and athletic facilities, art students should look at a college's studio space or practice rooms, performance or exhibit venues on campus, darkroom facilities (for photographers), computer resources, and any other resources specific to their field of study. Students should ask questions about how accessible these resources are. Attractive studios are of no help if there aren't enough to go around.

Reputation and philosophy

Students should talk to their art, music, drama, or dance teachers about the reputation of the colleges they are considering. Students should ask the colleges about career opportunities for graduates and about what school alumni are doing. The goal here is to get some idea of how the program is perceived by professionals in the career field and what career opportunities are available upon completion of college.

It is also important to ask each college about their philosophy. Different fine arts or music programs can have very different emphases. For example, one music program may emphasize classical music, while another specializes in more modern forms, like jazz. Similarly, the intensity of competitiveness, workload, and pressure can vary from school to school. During visits and interaction with students and faculty, students should try to get an impression of the daily pressures of being a student in that particular program.

A good fit

Finally, as for any student, visual and performing arts students need to find a college that fits their personality, interests and goals. Especially for very ambitious students, it's easy to be dazzled by the prestige of a top professional school or arts department and overlook the question of whether the program is right for them.

"When working as dean of enrollment at New York City's Manhattan School of Music, I would run across the occasional unhappy student who came to New York City because someone else had told them that New York or Manhattan School of Music or a particular teacher was perfect for them. They listened to those mentors instead of their gut and made a wrong choice," says Gandre. "No matter how talented the student and how wonderful the school, fit is always crucial."

Internet Resources

<http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/Events/CollegeFairs/PVA/>

<http://portfolioday.net/>

http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/columns/general_music/guide_to_music_college_admissions.html

<http://www.nacacnet.org/MemberPortal/News/StepsNewsletter/Choosing+High+School+Courses+for+College+Success.htm>

http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/majors/50.0501.html

<http://nast.arts-accredit.org/index.jsp>

http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/majors/50.0702.html

http://www.collegeboard.com/csearch/majors_careers/profiles/majors/50.0901.html

<http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/>

A University Example:

<http://admissions.syr.edu/applying/requirements/vpa.cfm>

<http://admissions.syr.edu/applying/collegerequirements.cfm>

<http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Admission/applyingtobrown/abouttheapplication.html>

A less selective school example:

http://admissions.tc.umn.edu/admissioninfo/fresh_planning.html

<http://nebraska.unl.edu/requirements/freshman.asp>

Scheduling Issues

<http://central.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/counseling/>

<http://static.hcrhs.k12.nj.us/gems/counseling/Option2Information2007.pdf>

(See Attachments)

Music/Counseling Department Meeting Minutes

February 28, 2007

Purpose: Dialogue between counseling and music departments

The meeting was an opportunity for each department to discuss concerns in regard to the dwindling enrollment in music courses. Enrollment in ensemble music classes is currently at an all time low. In 2003 enrollment was at the highest point recorded since 1999; 134 students were enrolled in Symphonic band and Wind Symphony. In 2006 there are 85 students enrolled.

1. Concerns expressed by the Music Department:
 - a. Value of Arts education at HCRHS
 - i. Is it becoming obsolete?
 - ii. Is HCRHS becoming an academic high school instead of a comprehensive high school?
 - b. Message that students should focus on academic courses, AP's and Honors
 - i. Frustration for music department when everything seems geared to AP & honors.
 - c. Message that students are discouraged from pursuing music programs
 - d. Message perceived by parents to discontinue music studies
 - i. Losing the message that students who pursue music are still getting into good schools.
 - ii. Statistics support that students who take music all four years still get accepted at great schools, including Ivies.
 - e. Message needs to be conveyed to parents/students, that the pursuit of commitment to a unique skill can enhance college admissions
 - i. Financial opportunities/incentives are available for musicians
2. Barriers preventing students from taking music:
 - a. Block scheduling and mandated graduation requirements.
 - i. There are 64 blocks in a 4 year schedule. Minimum mandated graduation requirements use 42 of those blocks, (does not include AP courses which are 7.5 credits and take three quarters)
 - ii. Past graduation requirement: 10 credits in Visual and Performing Arts. Current requirement: 5 credits in Visual and Performing Arts and 5 credits in Practical Arts. This means that students who once could take 10 credits in music are now forced to take 5 credits in a practical art to meet their graduation requirement.
 - b. Students doubling up on math courses to meet prerequisites for science courses.
 - c. Students doubling up on math to obtain skills needed for SAT testing in the spring of their junior year. SAT testing now includes Algebra 1, Algebra 2 and Geometry.
 - d. Students have expressed a fear of rejection for courses requiring auditions and placement testing
 - e. Message discouraging continuation of courses often comes from students and parents comparing information – teen talk and peer pressure, not from counselors.
 - f. Competing factors
 - i. Students are not discouraged from pursuing music/art programs. There are many competing factors. Students are presented with choices, advised to keep doors open, look at large picture.
 - ii. Students are encouraged to go to the web-sites for the colleges they are considering to view college entrance requirements.
 - g. Students not being steered away, but being told to make informed decisions.

- h. A very talented musician should follow this passion and be encouraged. It will help with admissions. However, a student who isn't precocious has to be aware that selective colleges are looking at academic rigor (Hons and AP) as the number one determinant for admissions. We would be hurting kids if we did not inform them of this.
3. College Landscape:
- a. Landscape of college admissions is changing dramatically every year.
 - b. Parents put pressure on counselors to give honest assessment of college admissions requirements.
 - i. Colleges used to want the well-rounded student, they are now looking for the well-rounded class, students with specific commitment to a passion.
 - ii. Colleges calculate the GPA of students in "academic" courses and count academic units.
 - iii. Varsity and "JV" AP classes – courses like AP Environmental Studies and AP Statistics, AP Music are viewed in the "JV" category.
 - iv. The selectivity of colleges has dramatically changed. Schools previously considered safety schools are now emerging as selective schools
 - v. The reality is that students are denied admission if their transcript does not demonstrate academic rigor.
 - c. Most HCRHS students do not go to Ivies or Most Selective schools
4. Solutions:
- a. There is a committee reviewing scheduling
 - b. Enrichment Summer School (Advancing Credit School)
 - i. On-going discussions between HCRHS and ESC to offer Enrichment summer school in addition to the traditional remedial summer school. Enrichment summer school will allow students to take academic courses during the summer (for a fee) and open up blocks during school year.
 - c. Option II
 - i. Opportunities for students to take courses outside of the parameters of the school day (opportunity for students to pursue practical arts requirements through Option II)
 - d. Continue to encourage students with passion in music and arts.
 - i. Increase dialogue between music teachers and counselors. Counselors may not be aware of students who excel in music or arts. Teaching staff can alert counselors to students who should be encouraged to pursue programs.
 - ii. Convey message that sustained commitment to a program can help separate students
 - iii. Convey message that there is evidence that certain extracurricular activities raise the odds for college acceptance.
5. Summary
- a. Assure that message is conveyed to parents/students that commitment to a passion can help college admissions
 - b. Counseling department has a great respect for the arts and music departments, the commitment of the students involved in the programs, the bonds that these students are able to form.
 - c. All parties are aware of the strong competitive force. Students need to have a balance and make choices.
 - d. Students with a passion should be encouraged to pursue their passion.
 - e. Counselor objectives:
 - i. Present options to students
 - ii. Advise students to pursue passions
 - iii. Advise students to keep doors open