

District C Schools

Understanding College Requirements

As parents and students look forward to college, it is time to understand what basic college requirements are. Specific information concerning colleges and admission requirements can be obtained directly from the admissions office of the school. This information is contained in the college's general catalogue and a variety of other publications that colleges and universities publish.

Most high school counseling offices and major libraries also have a college catalogue library. The catalogues describe the specific course requirements, standardized tests that must be taken, personal essays and other special requirements. The high school guidance counselor or college counselor can help you understand these requirements.

Most major universities will request that your application include as core requirements:

Coursework

As a basic requirement for admission, students must satisfy successful completion of specific coursework in high school. The completion of basic requirements for graduation from high school may or may not meet individual college entrance requirements. The more competitive the college or university, the more important the quality and level of that coursework. Honors and Advanced Placement classes are considered with greater weight than 'regular' classes. Courses taken at the college level while in high school also carry more weight when being evaluated by a college admissions office.

Parents and students should look, not only at the minimum requirements, but more importantly at the recommended coursework. Many students will meet the minimum requirements, but fewer will meet or exceed the recommended requirements. Therefore, it is to the student's advantage to take the third and fourth years of a foreign language or math analysis or calculus. Generally, colleges will not accept coursework for admission purposes unless the student has earned a grade of "C" or better in the class.

Grade Point Average

The student's grade point average (GPA) and class ranking are other important factors that colleges consider. ***Each college and university will define how they want a grade point average computed for their school.*** Some colleges will give extra weight to Advanced Placement and honors classes while others will not. Be sure to use the guidelines of each college that you are applying to as well as that of your local high school or school district when computing the student's GPA. Class rank is the student's GPA in relationship to all other students in a graduating class. The student with the highest GPA is ranked number one in the graduating class.

Standardized Tests

Most colleges and universities require standardized tests as part of their admissions process. Be sure to check the exact testing requirements of all the colleges to which you are applying. Students should take and submit scores for either the Scholastic Assessment Test I (SAT I) or American College Test (ACT), as well as scores from the Scholastic Assessment Test II Subject Tests (SAT II). These tests are given throughout the year. It is the student's responsibility, not the school's, to send the test results to the colleges.

Scholastic Assessment Test I (SAT I)

The SAT I is given seven times a year. The test is 2 1/2 hours long and includes two 30 minute sections testing vocabulary, reading comprehension and verbal reasoning. There are two 30-minute sections evaluating arithmetic reasoning and a 30-minute exam on English proficiency. The SAT scores are reported as verbal and math scores, with a maximum score of 800 for each section or 1600 overall.

American College Test (ACT)

The ACT is given 6 times during the year. It tests a student's knowledge in four areas: English (45 minutes), Mathematics (60 minutes), Reading (35 minutes) and Science reasoning (35 minutes). A composite score is reported to colleges ranging from 1 to 36.

Scholastic Assessment Test II Subject Tests (SAT II)

Many colleges also require that students take and submit scores for one or more SAT II subject tests in addition to the SAT I or ACT as an admission requirement. The Scholastic Assessment test(s) II are given six times a year in a wide variety of curricular areas including English, history, foreign language, social studies, math and science. The SAT II subject tests are one hour each and are multiple-choice.

The course work taken in high school, grade point average and class rank, and scores on either the SAT I or ACT and on SAT II Tests will be compared to those of other students applying to the same college and are used as criteria for admission. The more difficult and rigorous the coursework completed, the higher one's GPA, and class rank and the higher one's scores on standardized tests, the more competitive the student is in applying to colleges and universities. Most colleges identify recommended coursework, median grade point averages and median scores on standardized tests in various publications.

Additional Considerations for College Admission

While grade point average, coursework taken and scores on standardized tests are basic college admission considerations, most colleges often require or, in many cases, consider the following items as part of the admission process.

Personal Essay

The personal statement or essay is a requirement for most colleges and universities. It usually requests a student to describe him or herself to the college admissions office. The essay is usually one to two pages in length and may be autobiographical or may address a subject of current interest. Students may be asked to comment on a subject of current interest or an event that has affected his or her life. This essay gives the student an opportunity to provide the college with information about his or her judgment, maturity, sensitivity, or depth as well as what he or she might gain from or contribute to a particular school.

School & Community Activities

School and community activities can be an important part of a college application. A strong resume is not created in one's senior year, but is developed over an entire high school career beginning in the ninth grade. In addition, colleges are not looking for individuals who "join" everything to "enhance" a resume. Instead they consider the depth of involvement, commitment, creativity and initiative that a student brings to a club, organization or project. Participation and commitment over a period of years is more important than a one semester effort.

Special Abilities

Many students have special abilities. They may be musical, athletic or other special or unique talents. Each student should ask him or herself, "Do I have a talent that is unique or special?" If so, there are many colleges that may be interested in the applicant's abilities. The high school guidance counselor or college counselor may help in identifying these talents and colleges that may be interested in them.

References/Recommendations

References are normally a part of many college applications. Students and their parents should keep the following points in mind when a recommendation is required:

Adults who will write recommendations should know the student very well. They should be able to describe an individual both as a student and as an individual. The title of the person who writes the letter is not as important as how well he or she can write about the student. It is the applicant's responsibility to provide references with a resume. Be sure to thank all references in writing after they complete the recommendation.

Since individual colleges may also have additional criteria for admission, ***it is very important to research that criteria for each college to which one is applying.***

