

College News

March 2015



Important College Dates & Deadlines for the Seniors (Class of 2015):

- **Mid-March, 2015** is when most UC and CSU schools begin notifying applicants of admission or denial. Berkeley and UCLA are the last to send notices (surprise, surprise)
- **Spring Break 2015:** Spring Break is the time to make final visits to schools that have made them offers of admission. This is also the month students will begin notifying schools of their decisions. Information about scheduling trips to UC & CSU campuses can be found at the following link on our website [UC Campus Events & Tours](#)
- **May 1, 2015: Commitment Deadline!** Students must formally confirm acceptance or declination of an offer of admission by this date.
- **May & June, 2015:** are critical months for seniors because last semester grades do count! Spring semester classes (that were listed on the student's admission application) that are dropped or not passed with at least a "C" may result in a college rescinding its offer. Most competitive universities expect seniors to maintain at least a 3.0 GPA in the senior year



Important College Dates & Deadlines for the Juniors (Class of 2016):

- **Saturday, April 25, 2015 (9 –11 am in G9).** College Application Writing workshop by Mrs. Schultheis. [Click here for more information and to download the registration form](#)
- **May 14, 6:30pm-8pm (Pavilion):** Junior Class College Advisement Parent Night. Mrs. Hawkins and the OPHS Counselors will update parents on what they should be doing to assist their juniors about the college application process in their senior year.
- **May 18, 19, 20 (1:15-2:30pm in G-9):** Mr. McLelland (Ni-Z), Ms. Heeney (A - GL) & Ms. Stasiefski (Gm-Nh) will be meeting with their respective Juniors to prepare them for the college application process in their senior year.



The Junior Year:

Juniors are faced with their most intense academic experience and need to be mentally and physically prepared for a very demanding year. Students preparing for a highly selective college should be enrolled in a set of rigorous classes that may include between 2-4 Honors and/or Advanced Placement classes. However, all OPHS juniors will experience the high expectations of a college prep curriculum which anticipates that students have begun to emerge as young adults who are organizing their time and prioritizing their interests in order to put their best foot forward. Besides the challenging coursework, juniors have to pay attention to participating in a testing sequence that will enable them to take advantage of the admission options they will encounter as seniors. It is also the time when they begin to define their "lists" of colleges that change and evolve over the course of the year.

The "To Do" list for juniors is much more detailed than the first two years of high school:

- Students should be even more focused on their extracurricular activities this year, reaching for leadership and excellent performance in their chosen interests.
- This summer between the junior & senior year is the last opportunity you have to make up any "D" grades you may have earned in college preparatory courses. Remember, even though a "D" earns credit for high school it is unacceptable for most colleges and universities!
- Stay organized. During this year, especially after taking the PSAT, colleges will begin to send large amounts of material to you. It helps if you file information alphabetically or by state in a file cabinet or large container.
- The spring of the Junior year is "testing mania" time. This is the time for students to be taking the SAT Reasoning Test and/or the ACT along with the SAT Subject Tests if you plan to apply to a UC. Much more detail follows lower on this web page.

- If you are interested in a military academy or ROTC, the process should begin in the fall of the junior year by contacting your local state representative who has the nomination papers and an outline of the procedures.
- Seriously begin the process of visiting colleges over the summer. Try to incorporate these visits into family vacations!
- GRADES! Finish this year strong - these are the last grades you will have to show your colleges when you apply in the fall. The Senior year is essentially all "in progress" on your or your college applications!



GPA vs. Course Rigor in College Admissions

“How Does A Student’s Transcript Impact The College Admission Decision?” Many factors influence admissions decisions, including essays, SAT scores, letters of recommendation and interviews. But the student’s transcript is the most vital. It gives admissions officers an understanding of a student’s academic experience to date, as well as their potential to succeed in college. The specific process used to evaluate transcripts may differ slightly from one college to another. At selective colleges, it is a highly individualized process. Everyone on the admissions staff carefully examines a student’s academic record, year by year and class by class. They make note of trends (upward and downward) in the academic performance and look to see whether the student is choosing challenging courses. They examine the high school’s profile to see the kind of academic program it offers.



[Print the OPHS School Profile](#) to view the OPHS School Profile.

They also look back on historical data to see who else from your high school that has applied to their school and what their transcripts looked like. Sometimes they will even call guidance counselors to clarify their questions. What follows are a few insider tips on transcript evaluation, and how to present yourself as a competitive candidate.

High School Grades & Course Rigor Matter Most in College Admission In a February 2014 article from NACAC (National Association of College Admission Counseling) it revealed that a student’s high school record is the most important factor in college admission decisions, according to survey results released by NACAC. Data in the 11th annual edition of NACAC’s State of College Admission report shows students’ grades and the academic rigor of their course loads weigh more heavily in decisions to admit than standardized test scores, high school class rank or demonstrated interest in attending. “The results show that getting good grades in challenging courses is what college admission offices value most,” said Joyce E. Smith, NACAC’s chief executive officer. “This is valuable news for college-bound students and their families.”

Important note: A “B” grade is considered **above average**, and qualifies as a “good grade” for college admission purposes. For more on this – please read on!

GPA vs. Course Rigor

- Avoid being a “GPA protector.” Don’t play it safe by enrolling in easy classes. An effortless “A” is not as impressive as a hard-earned “B” or “C.” Taking challenging classes throughout high school — including senior year — shows the people reading your application that you’re serious about your education and that you’re ready to thrive in college.
- Plan ahead. Working with your guidance counselor, come up with a long-term plan to help you meet your college goals. Choices you make early in your high school career may affect your ability to enroll in classes later on that could make you a stronger candidate for college admissions.
- Ask questions. As soon as you have decided where you want to apply, get in touch with the admissions offices and find out exactly what types of courses they value most. For most it will be 4 years of English, math, science, language and history, but some — particularly those with a specialized focus like music — may place greater emphasis on high school performing arts classes
- Don’t be deterred by one bad grade. Colleges understand if you have one grade that’s not reflective of your usual ability. Don’t stress. Refocus and work hard. What’s important is that you’re able to demonstrate that you’re getting back on track.

➡ Click on the following hyperlink to view a real life example of an OPHS graduate who earned numerous “B” and even “C” grades but persevered in the most rigorous courses offered at OPHS and was ultimately rewarded with admission offers to several highly selective universities – including UC Berkeley, Cornell and USC.



[Print Student's Transcript](#)

Just How Important Is That GPA?

- One of the most common questions that come up in conversations with either your students or their families is – “Is my GPA high-enough to get into college? Will a C+ in this AP class ruin my GPA? Shouldn't I take a standard-level class and get an A versus an honors level class and get a B since it will make my GPA higher? A recent article in USA Today looked into this issue, and finds what college admissions offices have been telling us for years--that for many schools, the GPA in-and-of itself is not the key factor. Rather, it is the grades students receive in their classes and the rigor and challenge of the classes themselves about which colleges are really concerned.
- There is no real consistency from one school system to the next, and as college admissions offices receive applications from all over the United States and the world, trying to compare applicants by their GPAs is like comparing apples to oranges. Thus, many colleges will recompute GPA's according to their own formulas to level the playing field for the students in their applicant pool, like the University of California. Some will take out all weights. Some will only factor in "core" classes to include math, science, English, social-studies, and world language. Others will not do any computations at all, but rather evaluate the transcript holistically, looking at the level of classes a student took and the grades they received in those classes.

Context is Critical

- Remember, every high school is different. They may seem similar, but the curricula of high schools vary widely. Some have a very rigid class structure, while others may not even offer honors or A.P. classes. Not to worry. You won't be penalized. College admissions officers will take the time to understand the curriculum of your school.
- Each aspect of an applicant's transcript is evaluated within the context of his or her high school. The content in that graphic represents a fictional example of how a student's transcript could look. While the example I used showed a student whose high school offered honors and A.P. courses, other high schools may offer International Baccalaureate or other programs of equal rigor. All of this is taken into account during the evaluation process. Beware of “urban legends.” As alluded to above, it's dangerous to compare yourself to others in different high schools who have a similar G.P.A. or class rank and assume you'll get accepted or rejected based on their experiences. Colleges evaluate students within the context of their high school, taking into account differences in grading scales, class size, course offerings and historical data.



USING NAVIANCE

At OPHS we use Naviance and one benefit is that it allows students to compare their GPA's with the GPA's of past-students (no identifying information is given) who applied to a specific college or university. Because the data is restricted to one school, this is a like-to-like comparison using the same GPA computation. Thus, it can give a student a realistic idea of how they might stack up based on past year's admission data for their school. However, even this needs a word of caution, as the rigor of the classes may not always be reflected within this one data point. Thus, a student can have a really high GPA but not necessarily be competitive depending on their class choices, or a student from your school can have a slightly lower GPA than the average for a particular college but still be a strong candidate because of the rigorous classes they took. Additionally, the GPA can be a good common reference point when talking to students and families in general about post-secondary goals within your own school population. It is an understood measurement within your community to begin discussions about classes and college goals.

The OPHS Senior Survey Each year the OPHS Counselors survey 100% of the graduating seniors to determine their post-graduation plans. This survey data is available back to the class of 2000. This survey not only contains the list of schools students were admitted to, but it includes even more data about GPA's, and the number of AP/Honors classes students took who were admitted to specific schools.

➡ You can view OPHS Senior Survey results at the following link on the OPHS website:
<http://www.oakparkusd.org/Page/5401>

In Conclusion It's important to remember that the high school transcript isn't simply a listing of courses taken and grades received. It tells a detailed story about a student's high school career and the choices they've made. It's a story that's required reading for admissions officers. The best advice for students and families may be to focus a little bit less on the GPA, and encourage students to take the most challenging and rigorous courses they can manage successfully within the context of their entire life, and strive to get A's and B's in those classes. That, in and of itself, is the best formula for the beginnings of a strong college admissions profile.

➡ For more information about **GPA and Class Rank** go to the following link on the OPHS website:
<http://www.oakparkusd.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=879>

➡ For more information about **Honors & AP Courses** at Oak Park go to the following link on the OPHS website:
<http://www.oakparkusd.org/page/876>

➡ For more information about the admission process at **Highly Selective Colleges & Universities** go to the following link on the OPHS website: <http://www.oakparkusd.org/site/Default.aspx?PageID=1108>