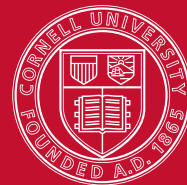


Undergraduate Admissions Office Admissions Bulletin High School Choices and College Chances



High School Choices and College Chances

As you enter and progress through high school, it's natural to feel excitement about the new prospects open to you, as well as some anxiety about how and what you will do with all those opportunities. At the same time that you are trying to decide what classes to take, clubs to join, and sports to play, parents and guidance counselors are encouraging you to look even further ahead, to consider how your high school career will affect your admission to college. It can seem overwhelming!

You don't need to decide in ninth grade where you'll go to college or what you'll study once you're there. Pursue your interests and talents as they develop over the next few years. Learning what you like and what you're good at will better prepare you for college than agonizing over what will "look good" to admission officers.

Academic Preparation

That said, it's important not to close doors to the future before you know what it holds. If you're even considering going on to college, you'll want to take the basic courses that will prepare you to do college work. You'll find these courses a good foundation on which to add other courses that spur your interest or whet your imagination. A basic preparation for college work includes these high school courses:

- 4 years of English
- 3 years of mathematics
- 3 years of science (including at least 2 lab sciences)
- 3 years of a foreign language
- 3 years of social science (history, social studies, etc.)

It's likely this basic schedule is suggested, urged, or even required by the college preparatory program at your school. The reason is that these basics help prepare you for everything from a liberal arts college to an engineering school. They are, of course, not the only courses you'll take in high school, but they will keep doors open for you until you decide what you want to do after high school.

Those of you who are really thinking ahead might wonder whether to take Advanced Placement (AP), Honors, International Baccalaureate, or similar advanced courses in these and other subjects. Others of you may be concerned that your school doesn't offer advanced or accelerated classes. For those in the latter group, don't worry: admission officers won't penalize you for not taking courses that aren't offered at your school. We're looking to see that students do the most with what is available to them. If your school doesn't offer AP classes, take a few of the "tough" classes (you'll know which they are—your friends will tell you!) to challenge yourself and prepare for college work. If advanced classes are offered by your school, take a sampling of them. Challenging course work is more likely to open your eyes to what you really like to study—or what you don't—than years of classes that fail to motivate you.

What should you do beyond the basics? Well, that's really up to you. Take fine art and music courses. Take a heavier concentration of the courses

you like: more-advanced math or science (especially if you are thinking of pursuing a major in math, science, or engineering in college), special writing classes in English, more languages, even independent projects with teachers who share a special interest with you. This additional work should be inspirational and enjoyable, since you'll be pursuing what you like best.

Activities Outside the Classroom

Your high school experience shouldn't be limited to the classroom, however. Life outside class can be valuable, too. You might pursue something related to an academic interest—working with a veterinarian if you're interested in a career as a vet—or an activity that provides a balance to schoolwork, such as athletics, music, theatre, or volunteer work. You might want to test your skills as a leader by participating in student government or heading one of the clubs at your school. Activities like debate or math team competition can hone your skills for life.

Approach your activities based on what you find rewarding rather than what you think college admission officers might seek; you may be surprised to learn we're more interested in seeing leadership and significant involvement in a few activities meaningful to you than a long list of activities in which you were minimally engaged. And keep in mind that an after-school job is an "activity," too. Admission officers realize many students need to work to help cover family or college expenses, and we respect that. (Some schools, like Cornell, even reward that effort with special fellowships for students who worked or were significantly involved in community service during high school.)

In spite of all the advice you're getting right now—or because of all the advice—you may still feel confused about how to make the most of high school. That's understandable. But if you take the decisions one by one, keeping doors open and pursuing what appeals to you most, you'll be surprised at how prepared you'll be when the next step comes. There's lots of change, challenge, and fun ahead—enjoy!

For Further Information

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