



College Planning 101



YVONNE ESPINOZA
COLLEGE COUNSELING SERVICES

The college planning and application process should be an exciting time in a student's life, however, the complexity of college admissions can often result in undue stress and frustration. The application process has become an increasingly nuanced affair, with planning starting earlier in the high school career to prepare for the numerous tasks and requirements that will accompany applying to college. Although there are more resources available to students and families than ever before (thanks to the internet and advances in technology), parents often express feeling overwhelmed by the abundance of information, left unsure of where to begin. Below are some focal points that my clients use to begin the college planning and search process. Parents can begin academic planning in middle school, and I begin my college consulting services as early as the summer prior to the 9th grade year of high school.

The High School Transcript

A student's transcript is one of the most important factors in college admissions and is an ideal place to start for college planning. Colleges like to see that a student has chosen a challenging college preparatory curriculum, and will be evaluating students based on what courses were available to them and how they performed compared to their peers.

- Most colleges (with some exceptions) will be reviewing courses and performance from the 9th grade onwards, and students should be aware that 9th grade courses do count towards the high school GPA.
- For core classes (English, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language), families should ensure course selection corresponds with specific college requirements, as state graduation requirements can differ from admission requirements.
- The IB and AP programs are both considered to be more standardized and preferred by selective colleges than dual credit. Although dual credit is a great option for families wanting to save money at in-state public universities, families can also gain college credits through AP and IB exams.
- I encourage my clients to explore academic subjects of interest related to careers and majors, but it's also important for students to engage in courses that are talent-based or that reflect personal interests. Exploring is a critical aspect of helping students to discover their identities, and to also help them to separate career from personal interests.

The College Resume

In addition to grades, colleges will also be evaluating how students spent their time outside of class exploring academic interests and talents, pursuing leadership roles, and contributing to their communities. Students can start documenting activities for college as early as the summer before 9th grade year (earlier than that won't be added to college applications).

- I advise my clients to create a college resume ASAP to begin keeping track of clubs, community service, leadership, and summer activities. This is a great resource that will allow students to determine where they need more growth, and also will help to save time filling out college applications once senior year arrives.
- *Quality, not quantity.* Colleges do not expect students to be involved in a vast array of different clubs and activities. During the 9th and 10th grade years, it's natural for students to explore diverse clubs to figure out which they enjoy the most. The 11th and 12th grades, however, are a time for students to pursue leadership roles in those activities, or to focus more time on the clubs that are more closely aligned with career interests and/or that bring them the most joy.
- Families often ask me what number they should aim for regarding community service hours. Although there is no set requirement, 50 hours or more is average, and over 100 hours would be outstanding. Students can accumulate these during the course of their entire high school career.

College Research

Each student is unique, and I only encourage college research for 9th and 10th graders if they are both enthusiastic about and open to beginning to look at schools. Students should be able to enjoy the high school experience without every aspect being associated with college, especially as they are acclimating to high school. However, for students who are excited to begin researching schools, setting foot on college campuses can increase awareness and confidence by the time students have to make final selections senior year. Visiting colleges both locally and out of state can help students to understand:

- What is the difference between large universities and smaller college campuses?
- Do I care if a college campus is in a more rural area, or do I want access to a larger city?
- Do I prefer certain areas of the United States (e.g. climate, political leanings, etc.)? Am I interested in studying abroad?
- Do I prefer small or larger class sizes? Is access to research and internships important to me?

Although I strongly believe that all students who want to go to college have a pathway, no matter when they begin their journey, students can best prepare, plan, and maximize their potential if more time is allotted for this process. For further guidance or to inquire about services, please feel free to contact me directly or refer to my website below for more information.

