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Honors & AP Courses

Understanding the advantages

Studies have shown that the rigor of a student's high school curriculum is the single best predictor of success in college. In his seminal study, *The Tool Box Revisted: Paths to Degree Completion from High School Through College* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 2006), Clifford Adelman demonstrated that the academic intensity of a high school curriculum is essential to student success in college.

The National Association for College Admission Counseling's (NACAC) annual State of College Admissions survey consistently finds that student performance in college preparatory classes is the most important factor in the admissions decision. With this in mind, encourage enrollment in honors and AP courses even if your students have the impression that only "top" students should take these courses or the fear that taking a challenging course might result in a lower GPA. Advanced-level courses are worth the extra effort.

Implications for admissions

Students don't understand how much weight college admissions officers give to advanced-level courses *on an* applicant's transcript. Explain to your students (and their parents) that admissions officers are not impressed by straight A's when they are all earned in easy courses. Gretchen Rigol, the author of *Admissions Decision-Making Models: How U.S. Institutions of Higher Education Select Undergraduate Students* (College Board, 2003), writes, "GPAs are 'weighted,' with extra points being given for honors or AP courses." (.pdf/239K) *Requires Adobe Reader (latest version recommended)*.

Students should take a balanced load, one that allows them to devote the necessary time to each course. Colleges look for quality, not quantity. According to Dan Saracino, assistant provost for enrollment at the University of Notre Dame: "Nothing is more important than the quality of the course load."

If your school does not yet offer AP or honors courses, encourage students who have exhausted all your school offerings to enroll in courses at a local college.

Honors or AP?

Honors classes often offer the same curriculum as regular classes, but are tailored for high-achieving students — covering additional topics or some topics in greater depth.

AP courses:

- Cover the breadth of information, skills, and assignments found in corresponding college courses
- Align with the standards and expectations offered at leading liberal arts and research institutions
- Provide motivated and academically prepared students the opportunity to study and learn at the college level

The College Board encourages all educators to make equitable access a guiding principle for their schools' AP programs, and to make every effort to ensure that their AP classes reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of their student body.

Most U.S. colleges and many international ones have an AP Credit Policy which allows students who have taken AP courses or exams to earn college credit, placement, or both.