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**ISSUE ANALYSIS**

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July 2006

## Preparing for College

*Note: For a comprehensive look at resources and information beneficial for teaching teens see HSLDA's Homeschooling Thru High School website: [www.hslda.org/highschool](http://www.hslda.org/highschool)."*

### Introduction

As the ranks of home-educated graduates continues to grow, the number of these students seeking college admission increases as well. College entrance requirements often catch families by surprise. The purpose of this memo is to help families understand and be prepared for the college admissions process. As you embark upon the journey of preparing your children for college, keep in mind the following.

- (1) Every college and university is different. We can describe what to expect generally, but you will find the application process varies from school to school as you begin your investigation. For example, a college or university might require homeschoolers to provide transcripts from parents, SAT scores, SAT II scores, ACT scores, or more than one of the above. Some schools even have their own entrance exams. Since few colleges today require homeschoolers to have a GED score, taking this test is not generally recommended. If, however, a college does request it, you may want to ask them to waive this requirement.
- (2) Colleges often place requirements on homeschooled students which they do not require of their public school applicants. Although homeschoolers tend to be excellent and qualified students, their high school transcripts are not usually accredited by an outside agency. To maintain standing with their own accrediting agencies, some colleges and universities believe they must impose extra requirements on home educated students. However, in recent years, more and more colleges are now accepting well-prepared and accurate parent-created transcripts without hesitation.

### Designing a 4-Year High School Program

College preparation should begin when the student starts high school (around age 13). Let us look briefly at what traditional high schools do and what colleges are used to seeing on applications. Below is a typical example of courses required for graduation by most high schools for those students planning to go on to college. There are five main academic subject areas: English, Math, History/Social Studies, Science, and Foreign Language. In addition to these core academic subjects, students usually add electives to supplement their high school programs. Electives require less work than academic core courses and are usually given either one-half or one-quarter credit depending on the hours that are logged. (Evaluation of credit hours is discussed later.) Although it varies somewhat from state to state, the plan looks something like this:

### Typical College Prep High School 4-Year Program

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Suggested Credits</b>	<b>Possible Courses</b>
English	4 credits	Composition, American Lit, World Lit, British Lit, Rhetoric, Creative Writing, Speech, Journalism, etc. Consider AP courses
Math	4 credits	Algebra 1&2, Geometry, Trig, Pre-Calculus, Calculus, AP Calculus
History	3-4 credits	Essentials: World History, American History, American Government Consider: Economics, Geography, Constitutional Law, and AP courses
Science	3-4 credits	Physical Science, General Science, Earth Science, Biology, Chemistry, Physics Consider AP courses
Foreign Language	2-4 credits	French, Spanish, Latin, German, Russian, etc. (at least 2 years of the same language are preferred)
P.E.	1-2 credits	Physical education—many options are available
Fine Arts	1-2 credits	PArt, Music, Drama, Photography, etc.
Electives	4 credits	Practical Arts, Life Skills, Computer Skills, Bible, Church History, etc.

**Total Credits: 24-28 credits**

*Note that homeschoolers are **not** legally required to follow this list during their high school years.* This framework is provided for purposes of comparison only. As a homeschool instructor you have a lot of flexibility to assess your student’s needs and abilities and select a course of study accordingly. Most colleges that want to see a transcript, however, will be looking for one which follows these general guidelines.

If you begin homeschooling in the high school years, you may need to focus more attention on academics than students who have been homeschooling most of their lives. Because the tutorial method of homeschooling tends to allow students to cover material in less time, homeschoolers are often ready for college work before they reach 12th grade. Therefore, carefully evaluate your own student to determine how much high school education is needed and what kinds of courses will benefit him or her. Keep an eye open for courses that will benefit his or her college career.

Let us take a closer look at what a four-year plan represents in terms of hours, weeks and years of class instruction. If you plan to prepare a transcript to use for college application, it needs to be accurate and generally conform in educational content to a four-year plan.

Each one-year course represents one credit towards graduation. Public school requirements vary from state to state; although 21-23 credits may be the norm, 24 credits minimum is recommended.

If you know what college your child wants to attend you should request the college’s catalog and note its admission requirements. Keep in mind that colleges usually list the minimum high school requirements in their catalogs or on their website, while a student who is offered admission typically exceeds the stated minimums.

If at this point your child is not certain he will attend college, your high school program still needs to be well-rounded and complete since your student will not be receiving any further formal education. The questions to consider in this case are: Are they ready academically for adult life? Are they equipped should they choose to pursue a college education at some later date?

## Grading Guidelines

Generally, one credit equals one year or 36 weeks of 50 minutes per day per subject. You may have heard this referred to as a “Carnegie unit.” It amounts to a little over four hours per subject each week or 150 hours per year. Studies of public schools reveal that due to several factors, real academic on-task time is actually half that or less.

In compiling your list of courses, be sure to take into account non-traditional classes. Parents can adapt these courses to meet college requirements fairly easily. The flexibility of homeschooling allows for a much broader range of courses than schools normally offer. Homeschools are not confined to teaching just what public schools teach. Colleges and universities receive applications from all over the world and usually are not dismayed by seeing courses that may seem unusual when compared to public school courses.

Say, as an example, you choose to teach Nutrition. As you seek to fulfill high school requirements, this class can meet Health, Science, or elective requirements, depending on where you need it. Remember to include seminars, lectures, tours, field trips and vacations as you compile course hours. While these may not stand alone as a subject, they may be combined with other studies to form a course.

Feel free to make up the name of your course in a way that describes its content. For instance, “Contemporary Moral Issues” could meet requirements for Social Studies. It would include research on contemporary moral issues like abortion, gun control, religious freedom, euthanasia or homeschooling. The student would select a position and write a documented paper and report on each subject. A string of such reports would comprise a course. Preparation might include interviewing a doctor or attorney as a part of researching the topic.

You are limited only by your creativity. These courses will go further towards college preparation than simply perusing a textbook, memorizing facts and reciting them for an exam. Textbooks have their place, but you do not need to be limited to their exclusive use. Most young people find learning much more enjoyable if they use textbooks as a springboard to branch into other resources for learning. Remember, however, not to count time spent on a particular activity for two different credits. Activities may be divided, but not counted twice.

Listed below are some examples of non-traditional courses that homeschoolers have used.

### Academic Courses

Nutrition

Public Speaking

Sign Language

Rhetoric and Articulation

Linguistics

Shakespearean Plays and Sonnets

Poetry

Creative Writing

Russian Literature

### Elective Courses

Institute in Basic Life Principles

Back-to-Genesis Science Seminar

State or National Park Programs

Justice of the Old Testament

Fashion Clinic

Astronomy Programs and Lectures (could supplement an academic course)

Music Lessons

Sports Camps (could also be Phys Ed)

Calligraphy

You might also consider using unit studies for some courses. Unit studies are a method of teaching where an incident or specific subject like the Iraqi War is used as a springboard to study the entire Middle East under specific topics like geography, religion, history, culture, music, etc. An earthquake in Japan may set in motion a group of studies including geology, geography, oceanography, seismology, etc. Mini-studies do not necessarily comprise a course, but, over time, they can be added together. Various categories of studies should be kept in a diary or other record. Over a period of years, the necessary hours for granting units will be evaluated and recorded on a transcript.

Work experience, apprenticeships, driver training, and team mission trips also have their place on your transcript. It is also possible to record smaller courses as one-half of a credit (20 weeks) or as a quarter credit (10 weeks). These courses typically are viewed as elective courses which are not required to be taken, but are chosen by the student to supplement and enrich his education.

The value of recordkeeping cannot be overstated as the primary ingredient to compiling a transcript for college. When a member of the admissions department at Harvard was asked what the department looks for on an application, he responded, "something different." You can build an impressive high school transcript by expanding far beyond what conventional schools offer.

### **Preparing Transcript Records for College Entrance**

Your transcript should be designed for the convenience of admissions directors who have to go through hundreds and sometimes thousands of transcripts. You can create your own transcript using the following information.

1. Your transcript needs to include grades 9-12. Classes are sometimes taken in the lower grades that count towards high school graduation, for instance, language or mathematics courses. These may be included at the parent's discretion. Some courses may begin in the 8th grade and be completed in the 9th and would be included under 9th grade records. Keep in mind that textbooks used must be high school level in order to receive high school credit. Also, consider that even though some high school courses are taken in 8th grade, it is a good idea to continue taking solid academic courses through the 12th grade year since colleges do not like to see easy or light course loads taken in the senior year. If your child takes some high school courses in 8th grade, then continue having them take more advanced courses each year all the way through the senior year. Some colleges may be hesitant to accept courses for high school credit that were earned prior to the 8th grade.
2. Your transcript should indicate the grade level of each course. This may be determined at the parent's discretion. At the beginning of each course, determine the method of evaluation you will use. Tests, quizzes, papers, etc. may all be used for evaluation purposes.
3. Work experiences or work-study, internships, and apprenticeships along with a short job description should be included. All information needs to be complete but concise. This information is typically included on a separate sheet which you can attach to the transcript.
4. An extra sheet of paper should be included to succinctly describe non-traditional courses. For example, Linguistics would be explained in one or two brief sentences.
5. Your transcript should indicate credits earned:

9 weeks =  $\frac{1}{4}$  credit

18 weeks =  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit

36 weeks = 1 credit

6. Your transcript should indicate grades earned and your grading scale. For example:

A = 92-100 B = 84-91

C = 76-83 D = 67-75

You can determine the scale you want to work with, but be sure to include this information. Consistently use one scale throughout the entire transcript.

7. Indicate grade point average (GPA). This is normally computed with A = 4 pts.; B = 3 pts.; C = 2 pts.; and D = 1 pt.

To calculate a Grade Point Average, simply convert each letter grade to quality points, total the quality points, and divide by the total number of credits.

As an example:

English	1 credit	A	4.0
Algebra 1	1 credit	B	3.0
Physical Science	1 credit	B	3.0
Spanish 1	1 credit	B	3.0
World History	1 credit	A	4.0
Art History	1 credit	B	3.0

Total Quality Points/Total Credits  $20.0/6 = 3.33$  GPA

The yearly GPA and the overall GPA for all four years of high school should also be computed. For instance:

9th 3.0

10th 3.4

11th 3.2

12th 3.6

Cumulative GPA: 3.3

(Calculation:  $3.0 + 3.4 + 3.2 + 3.6 = 13.2$

$13.2/4 = 3.3$

This method only works if the same number of credits is taken each year; if credits vary per year, then a weighted average should be used.)

8. Your transcript should include your graduation date. Colleges want to know when your studies were completed.

9. Your transcript may include the scores of college admissions tests (SAT, ACT); however, most colleges request that the results be sent directly from the testing service and need not be included in the transcript. In addition, some colleges may also require a homeschooler to take placement exams that the college will give in order to place the student in the appropriate course level.

Many admissions departments ask for a letter written by the applicant telling why he or she wants to be accepted. The application form will indicate this, but it's good to be prepared. In preparing your application or the letter, supply only the information requested. If admissions officers want to know more, they will ask.

### **College Application and Admissions**

It is a good idea for your student to contact the colleges of choice two years prior to planned admission to secure their college catalogs and applications. Public libraries often have a selection of college catalogs. However, most of the necessary information is now available over the Internet. College websites are full of helpful information as well as contact names/numbers should you have any questions. Colleges highly recommend that applications be made online. Your application will be processed quicker if you apply online, and in most instances you will be prompted if you neglect to answer a question or if you inadvertently enter the wrong information. This saves you and the college time and eliminates unnecessary follow up. Colleges require a payment of application fees that may average \$50 or more; therefore, you may wish to narrow your list of possibilities and only apply to those colleges in which you are most interested.

When your student receives a catalog, determine entrance criteria and begin to prepare for required tests. Make note of all application and test deadlines for grant and scholarship applications right away. Some tests are only given at certain times during the year. In addition, it can take several weeks for a college to process an application. You do not want to be caught missing an important deadline.

When contacting a college, try to gather as much information as possible about what will be expected from the student. If the school does not have an entrance policy for homeschoolers (or "non-traditional" students), and your student does not seem to fit in any of the available categories, ask an admissions counselor what requirements the school has for home-educated students. Some colleges now list their admission policies for homeschoolers on their websites. Many colleges have had the experience of admitting and enrolling homeschoolers, but it is possible that a particular college may never have admitted a homeschooler before and will need to work something out for you. In any event, do not let this deter you from applying—you may pave the way for future homeschool applicants!

If a particular requirement keeps your student from being eligible for college acceptance, contact the admissions office. Often entrance criteria can be waived or a compromise may be worked out. Persistence is often a deciding factor. If necessary, ask to speak with the Director of Admissions. He or she may be able to work out a problem that an admissions counselor is powerless to influence.

Problems sometimes arise because a college official may be unfamiliar with homeschooling. If you feel this is the case, graciously explain the benefits of home education and how it works. (You may want to have on hand the National Home Education Research Institute's article "[Homeschooling Grows Up](#)" to share with college officials. This article provides data and research on recent homeschool graduates.) Meet with the official to explain your homeschool program. Once the admissions official gets to know you and understands home education as an effective educational choice, he or she will usually be more willing to work out the perceived problems.

### **College Entrance Tests**

Colleges usually require either the [Scholastic Aptitude Test \(SAT\)](#) or the [American College Test \(ACT\)](#). Register quickly and easily online for either test. Mail-in applications for college entrance tests can be secured through local high schools, community colleges, and, in some cases, the local public library. Some community colleges also serve as test centers, and homeschoolers may register to take the SAT or ACT there.

The Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) must be taken to qualify for the National Merit Scholarship. This can be done in 10th or 11th grade. A student may take the PSAT in 10th grade as practice, but only 11th-graders are eligible to be considered for National Merit Scholarships. Local schools who proctor the PSAT do have a certain

amount of authority to impose rules on students taking this test, whereas, when a school gives the SAT or ACT, they must follow strict guidelines from the test publisher. Check with the school for its rules concerning administering the PSAT for home-educated students. Contact HSLDA should you encounter any difficulty when registering for the PSAT.

There are several ways to prepare for these tests. The yellow pages and local newspapers list private courses that will give practice tests and test taking tips. Check with local night schools, community colleges, and continuing education centers to see if such classes are offered in your area. These courses help make students more comfortable with the exam and give students the opportunity to brush up on subjects that will appear on the test. However, such classes are not designed to teach students a subject that they have not previously learned. You may want to consider hiring an SAT tutor to work privately with your child. In some cases, a tutor's fees may actually be less expensive than taking a class.

Check with your college to see what test it requires and what kind of scores it is looking for. If you are interested in self-preparation, SAT and ACT study manuals are available at bookstores and libraries. Both tests are revised periodically so you will want to make sure your manual is up to date. You may want to purchase a manual in eighth or ninth grade to use vocabulary lists for spelling and other areas. Computer software is also available for test preparation.

You can take college entrance tests several times and most colleges will consider your best results. Keep in mind though that the tests are best taken after the student has completed Algebra and Geometry because of the skill level required in the Math section. The new 2005 version of the SAT also requires some knowledge of advanced math and trigonometry. Test scores are normally combined with grades on a coordinating scale to determine eligibility for entrance. Generally, the higher the test score, the more flexible the GPA point requirement. There has been debate in recent years as to how important these scores are, and their significance varies from college to college. For instance, Bob Jones University uses test results for placement only in freshman classes. On the other hand, one can have a 4.0 or straight-A average and not be accepted at Harvard if test scores are not impressive.

[ACT and SAT test scores for homeschoolers](#) historically have been above the national averages.

ACT: (319) 337-1270

SAT: (609) 771-7600

PSAT: (609)771-7070

### **Acquiring College Credit While in High School**

Today homeschoolers have a number of ways to earn college credit while still in high school: dual enrollment, AP classes, CLEP tests, and distance learning.

**Dual Enrollment:** One option used by many homeschoolers is enrolling as a high schooler at a community college. Through these classes, your teen can earn both high school and college credit. Aside from offering instruction in subjects you may feel inadequate to teach, community college classes will save you money in the future if your student enters college and is able to transfer his credits (check with the four-year college of your teen's choice to make sure his community college credits will transfer). Because some freshman scholarships have limits on dual-enrollment credits, students should beware of accumulating too many credits and thus forfeiting their freshman status; check with the colleges administering the scholarships. However, if your student is going to transfer to a four-year college rather than apply as a freshman, his freshman status is not an issue. HSLDA members who are not sure of your state's regulations regarding dual enrollment may contact HSLDA Legal Department. For general questions about dual enrollment, members may contact HSLDA's high school coordinators.

**Advanced Placement (AP) Courses:** Advanced Placement (AP) courses are also offered to homeschoolers. These are rigorous courses taken during high school, but are taught at a college level. The courses typically require an extensive amount of study, reading, and writing. There are 34 different AP courses across 19 subject areas that culminate in the taking of a standardized AP test for each course given nationwide in the late spring (usually May). Acquiring a high score on the test will qualify the student to receive college credit for these courses (the score needed varies from college to college).

Homeschooled students can study and prepare for these tests, either on their own or by enrolling in online AP courses. Then, they must make arrangements through a local public or private school to register for and take a particular test. These arrangements should be made far in advance of the test date so that the school has time to order a test for your student. (Some public high schools are more accommodating than others in allowing homeschooled students to sit for tests. Contact the public school in your district—as an alternative, you can also try a nearby private school—in December or January to find out their policy for ordering and taking AP tests. For more information on AP exams, call (888) CALL-4-AP.

**CLEP Tests:** You might also consider having your students take the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests. CLEP tests are designed to assess the knowledge a student may already possess for the purpose of assigning college credit. Colleges and universities across the country give college credit for CLEP scores. Many homeschoolers are surprised at how much college level material they already know. Students may also save time and money by studying a particular subject on their own and taking the CLEP test for that topic. Since institutions do vary in which CLEP tests they will accept, what minimum scores they require, and how much they charge for processing CLEP credits, it is important to obtain your college’s CLEP policy before having your student sign up for any of these tests. For more information, please call (800) 257-9558.

**Distance Learning:** Distance learning is yet another option by which college credit can be earned. Many colleges and universities have set up departments through which homeschoolers can take college courses on line and receive college credit. Visiting colleges’ websites, students can obtain registration information and course selection listings available for each semester. In most cases, these credits can be transferred to the four year college the student chooses to attend.

### **Scholarships**

Some colleges make scholarships available specifically for homeschoolers. A few colleges, such as Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma and Nyack College in New York, give scholarships based on the number of years a student was homeschooled.

However, homeschoolers do qualify for many of the same scholarships available to traditionally schooled students. Be aware that high SAT or ACT scores as well as high scores on Advanced Placement tests are important factors used by organizations when awarding scholarships. A number of extensive guides cataloging available scholarships can be found in your local bookstore, public library, or online. Examples include [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org) and [www.fastweb.org](http://www.fastweb.org).

In addition, homeschoolers are now officially eligible for federal aid for college. [The Higher Education Act of 1998](#), Section 483, amended 20 USCS § 1091(d) to include home-educated students as a category eligible for assistance. Homeschoolers are no longer required to take a GED or “ability-to-benefit” test to qualify. This legislation was passed by Congress and signed by the president on October 8, 1998.

For an information booklet on federal aid for college, call (800) 433-3243 or visit the websites [www.ed.gov/prog\\_info/SFA/StudentGuide](http://www.ed.gov/prog_info/SFA/StudentGuide) and [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

### **Conclusion**

It is much easier for home-educated students to enter college today than in past years. As homeschooling moves toward the mainstream, more colleges are writing specific policies for homeschooled students. Some colleges are actively recruiting homeschoolers, realizing that these students tend to be above average in academic achievement.

Whether you are dealing with a homeschool friendly college or one which has never heard of homeschooling, there are two things you must keep in mind.

First, be prepared. Do your homework. Gather as much information about the schools of your choice as possible. Be ready to provide the information they request.

And second, be persistent. Persistence usually pays off when dealing with college staff. If you encounter obstacles anywhere in the process, seek out creative alternatives. “No” does not always mean there is no way. Contact HSLDA should you need assistance.

*For further information on this please contact the Home School Legal Defense Association. 540.338.5600, 540.338.1952 (fax), [Mailroom@hsllda.org](mailto:Mailroom@hsllda.org) Permission to reprint granted*