



Winter Quarterly Update

For 2020-2021 Freshmen

College Prep Priorities for Freshmen. With COVID conditions changing so much of our current school experience, preparing for college right now may feel impractical. However, the most basic things have not changed: the most important thing freshmen can do right now is to demonstrate strong academic performance. This means opting for a challenging but manageable curriculum and maintaining a high GPA. The second most important thing freshmen can do is develop one or more extra-curricular activities that encourage their special interests, skills, and talents. Read on!

Making School Count

- **Choose your courses for 2021-2022!** Counselors will be sending information soon with details about how to plan and register for next year's classes, so now is a good time to review and update your 4-year plan. The [RSD curriculum planning website](#) offers links to the [RSD High School Course Catalog](#) and the district's **4-Year Planning Tool**, which provides curriculum guidelines based on students' college and career track (you'll need a user login to use the 4-Year Planning Tool). Remember that colleges look for students who have taken advantage of some of the most academically challenging courses their high schools offer.
- **Do's and Don'ts of choosing classes.** Your grades and the strength of your curriculum matter when it comes to college admissions. Find out [why course selection is important](#) and learn [how to create a rigorous but balanced schedule](#).
- **Consider AP courses.** Advanced Placement classes offer an important opportunity for students to challenge themselves, improve college admissions chances, earn college credits, win scholarships, and arrive at college better prepared. Learn more about [why students should take an AP class](#) and check out this [complete list of AP courses and tests](#), including data on course popularity and passing rates. (Note that your high school may not offer all of these courses.) Read this blog for guidance on [how to choose your AP courses](#).
- **Take control of homework (so it doesn't control you).** Here are some [tips to help you deal with homework](#) more efficiently and effectively.
- **Develop your best study habits.** Tackling projects and homework with others can be a great way to learn, especially when you are not in class every day. If you study best in a group, search out students who are on a similar track as you and set aside a regular time to work together online. If you study best alone, take time to create a comfortable and practical working space dedicated to homework and study; parents can help by maintaining a background environment conducive to studying.
- **Focus your extracurricular activities.** Last quarter, this newsletter highlighted the importance of quality over quantity when it comes to extracurricular activities for college admissions. Now is a good time to begin zeroing in on a few activities you enjoy and can develop over the next three years. Read here for inspiration on [how to select your best extracurricular activities](#) and [how to create your own online extracurricular initiative](#).

Looking Ahead to College

- **Learn the lingo.** Conversations about college and college prep involve specialized vocabulary, including many expressions that may be unfamiliar (e.g., ACT, SAT, EFC, Common App). Don't let language get in your way! Here's a [college prep glossary](#), with links that provide information about each phrase.
- **Learn about types of college.** Is a college the same thing as a university? What does the term "liberal arts" mean? Why are some colleges called public and others private? Here are [the basics on types of colleges](#).

Careers & Majors

- **Not too early to begin exploring careers.** One of the most useful things students can do to prepare for college is to develop some career direction based on current interests and skills. Here's a good place to [start your career interest list](#). These exercises help develop personal self-reflection and self-awareness skills, which are also extremely valuable for college!
- **Interview two people about their careers.** Another way to start thinking about careers is to talk to people who work in professions that interest you to ask how they got started and how they feel about their work. What were the paths they took – both the academic path and the personal path – to get where they are now? Don't know anyone in the career you're interested in? Contact the HHS Career Center for help.

Finding Colleges for You

- **Name two or three colleges you've heard of.** Start your college list with a few colleges you'd like to learn more about. This list will grow and change over time, and that's expected. You can add or subtract colleges from your list as you figure out what you're looking for in a college. Here's a [quick guide for starting your college search](#).

Paying for College

- **Find out why college may cost less than you think.** Most students don't pay the full tuition price a college publishes. With financial aid offered through the college, the actual cost (or net price) is usually less. Learn about [net price vs. sticker price](#).
- **Maximize your financial aid.** Learn what you can do in 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades to [maximize your financial aid for college](#).

Mark Your Calendar!

- **Updated 2021 AP Testing Schedule.** The College Board has updated its [2021 AP testing schedule](#) to allow more options for its administration, including more test dates (May 3-17, May 18-28 and June 1-11). Check with your AP teacher(s) to learn what schedule your high school is following.



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