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Summer College Courses for Teens

By CWK Network Producer

"There's a lot of pressure that gets put on students who are looking to attend colleges, and they're looking for an edge."
-- Adam Lips, Higher Education Consultant

Recent reports indicate that high school graduates are heading to college in record numbers: Some 70 percent of the 2.9 million grads, according to the U.S. Labor Department. For high schoolers intent on joining the college-bound ranks, many are taking classes on college campuses, hoping to gain a small advantage over their classmates when they apply to college.

Seventeen-year-old Romy will study art at one of the nation's top art schools.

"I'm really excited about it," she says. "I think I'm gonna get to meet really interesting kids and just get to do something I really love to do."

If Romy ultimately decides to apply to college there, she hopes the summer program will help her get accepted.

"If you have similar credentials to someone else and it's between someone who didn't do some sort of program and someone who did, I think someone who did probably does have the edge," she says.

Getting into the nation's best colleges and universities has never been more competitive. But will a summer college program actually help?

"I would say it would give them an advantage over someone who did nothing with their time, but to say it would give them an advantage over someone who took a summer job, or [volunteered] in the summer, I don't think so," says Adam Lips, a higher education consultant.

Lips says colleges are looking for well-rounded students. Beyond jobs, volunteer work and summer classes, he says what still counts most are grades.

"It's important to do well in school and then sort of supplement that with things you're interested in and passionate about and to talk about those things in a way that present you as a good fit," says Lips.

Still, summer college programs do have one clear advantage: they can help students test-drive a college or career.

"I think it'll even help me decide whether I want to go to art school," says Romy. "'Cause I think it's a pretty intense program. I think it's really similar to how it would be going to the school."

What Parents Need to Know

SATs. Grades. Financial Aid. Application essays. It's a lot of work to apply to college! Add to that the fact that your student is competing with thousands of others for a spot at college, and the process can seem overwhelming. Knowing what to include on an application and how to help your child stand out is crucial to getting accepted into a college. According to experts at *The Princeton Review*, the application process can be divided into three areas of importance:

Most Important:

- **Grades:** Colleges view your child's high school grades as a major indication of how well he/she will do in their classrooms. A study showed that 83 percent of colleges said that high school grades carry "moderate" to "considerable" importance; grades in high school college prep classes received the same comment from 89 percent of schools.

- **Test scores:** Is it really worth all the time, effort and money spent preparing and taking college admission tests? Yes. According to 83 percent of colleges, a great deal of emphasis is placed on ACT/SAT scores, and scores do make a difference in assessing college applicants. Only 14 percent of schools said test scores have "limited" or "no" importance.
- **Class rank:** Unfortunately, this is somewhat out of your child's hands. Class rank depends on how many students are in the graduating class, the *mean grade point average*, and your child's grade point average. Also, grade points are skewed higher for honors classes, so "regular" class grades end up lower in the ranking. The only thing your children have control over is their own grades, so encourage them to do their best. Thirty-five percent of colleges said class rank has "considerable" importance; another 35 percent said it had "moderate importance." That means 70 percent of colleges consider class rank when assessing applicants.

Important

- **Essays:** If your child has a way with words, he/she should work the magic – but only if he/she is applying to a very competitive school. Otherwise, tell him/her to put in a strong effort, but not to sweat it. A great essay cannot override a poor performance on the SAT/ACT, or make up for a low GPA, but highly-selective colleges place more emphasis on essays and give them more attention than public schools with higher acceptance rates. Still, overall, less than 20 percent of schools attached "considerable importance" to the essay portion or writing samples.
- **Work/extracurricular activities:** Fifty-four percent of colleges surveyed ranked after-school activities as having "limited" or "no" importance. The bigger the school, the less importance it placed on what your child did with his/her free time. However, extracurricular activities can help students succeed in college. It's where students learn to prioritize, juggle many activities, and manage their time – all skills that students need in college. An after-school job provides work experience, potential references, responsibility, and perhaps even money to help pay for college.
- **Recommendations:** Only about 15 percent of schools put "considerable weight" on counselor or teacher recommendations. Another 15 to 19 percent said it was of "no" importance. The remaining colleges fell somewhere in between. A stellar letter can't hurt, but it doesn't speak the volumes that test scores and GPAs do.

Least Important

- **Interviews:** Unlike graduate schools, where an interview with the department head can make or break the admissions process, undergraduate schools often don't meet your child before deciding on acceptance. The bigger the school, the less importance is placed on interviews, partly because bigger schools have more applicants and less time to interview them. However, if your child is applying to a school with less than 5,000 students, he/she will need to practice his/her interview skills, including potential questions about current events, academic achievements, and personal goals.
- **Ability to pay:** Whether your child can actually afford a particular school or not often has little to do with whether or not he/she will be accepted. In fact, 77 percent of schools surveyed said ability to pay had "no importance." Between financial aid, scholarships, grants, loans and work study, colleges figure your child will come up with the means if he/she is set on the school.

Resources

[American College on Education](#)

[Federal Student Aid](#)

[The Princeton Review](#)

[Kaplan, Inc.](#)

[College Board Parent's Guide](#)

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