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**The 6-Step Critical Path to College**

Students achieve college readiness by the way they invest in themselves. This investment can pay off in a huge way by providing the student a wider range of university choices as well as scholarships to the school of their choice. These six steps are the critical path through high school to college.

**Grade Point Average (GPA).** GPAs represent your overall average grade upon completing each semester in high school. A core GPA is the average grade for your core classes: math, science, English, and social studies. While passing a high school class with a D counts toward high school graduation, it can be considered a deficiency for college admissions. GPAs are used as an indicator of your knowledge and your potential for success in college. A minimum GPA of 3.0 is standard. It is required for

* University/college admissions
* Scholarships

**College Prep Classes.** Students who wish to meet university entrance requirements will follow the course choices below. In addition to a 3.0 GPA, the requirements are:

Course\* Number Completed

English 4

Math 4

Science 3

Social Studies 3

World Language 2 (same language)

Fine Arts or CTE 1

PE 1

Electives 4

Weighted courses, courses which offer a higher degree of difficulty, add to college readiness. Advanced Placement classes are highly recommended as the weighted classes.

**Community & Extracurricular Activities/Summer Programs**. In addition to academic performance, scholarships request students demonstrate personal development, especially their leadership and community spirit.

* Extracurricular activities demonstrate a more complete education:
  + Sports
  + Music
  + Clubs
  + Science camps, or other academic summer camp
* Leadership is demonstrated by taking on positions of responsibility:
  + Team captain
  + Student council
  + Club officer
  + Working at a job
  + Internships
  + Other distinguishing role
* Community Spirit. Service Learning is a community volunteer program in which you donate your time and talents to help solve a community need. In addition, any other volunteer activity is also important on a resume.

**PSAT and ACT/SAT Test Preparation and Completion**. College entrance tests (ACT or SAT) are used to help identify a mastery of basic education. These tests can indicate that students who meet minimum required scores can be expected to succeed at college courses. Some scholarships require good ACT or SAT scores to qualify. Students prepare for ACT and SAT tests by mastering their high school course material and taking practice tests. The PSAT taken in 10th grade is a practice test and qualifies students for National Merit Scholarships.

**Resume, Letters of Recommendation and Personal Essay.**

* Resume. This document explains to its readers who you are. It captures your education, work history, community service, extracurricular activities and your leadership experience. It is used for:
  + Letters of Recommendation
  + Many scholarships
  + Job applications/internships
* Letters of Recommendation. Actual letters are provided by adults (usually not your parents) who can attest to your academic and personal qualities based on their personal knowledge of you. These are often required for:
  + Scholarships
  + Entry into special programs, such as leadership academies or internships.

When actual letters are not required, adults who can attest to your qualities are listed instead as your personal references.

* Personal Essay. Essays are an integral part of most scholarship applications and are also required for admission to many colleges and universities.

**Application completion: University/college, Scholarship and FAFSA.**

* University Enrollment Applications. Deadlines vary depending on the school you wish to attend, and checking the website is important. About 400 universities have early action options for students in the fall of their senior year, if students are very sure what school they wish to attend.
* Scholarship Applications. There are thousands of scholarships that can help with some of the cost for college, or even all of your college expenses. They are varied in what trait they wish to foster: sports, music, academic achievement, community service, or field of study. They are varied in their value: $150 - $200,000. Scholarships typically have a writing component and are often GPA-based. Usually scholarships are applied for in the fall and spring of the senior year, and potentially every year you are in school.
* Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). This federal aid program is needs-based and includes federal grants, loans and work study programs. Determinations for individual funding levels result when students complete their FAFSA application in October - March of their senior year and every year they are in college.

**Start now to position yourself for college. It’s the best investment you will ever make!**

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