

Some great questions (that pertain to HSAS) to ask colleges when visiting (3/2014) – M. Harris

There are more than 4500 college nationally, they are so varied (yet similar) in their admissions practices. This is a list of thought-provoking practical questions that are pertinent to the HSAS student population. Always ask your questions with respect, curiosity and concern. We have always been told that our students ask great questions. Here is a list of some questions to think about.

Transcript Issues

1. Does your college **re-calculate averages**?
 - Many colleges recalculate averages, they take out any weighting and omit elective course grades. Some colleges follow this practice, and some do not. Ask the question.
2. How does your college value **College Courses VS. AP Courses**?
 - As you know, we are located on a college campus. Some students may be faced with deciding between taking an AP course and taking a college course Junior/Senior year. We tend to view AP classes vs. College classes as equal, but different. Ask the colleges what they think!!
3. Does your college place greater value on the **TYPE** of college class taken? For instance, you have the choice to take “The City & The Theatre” (something fun), or “World Revolutions” (more serious). Do these choices weigh in on how your transcript is evaluated?
4. **Overall GPA vs. GPA rising over time** - Many student’s grades do improve over time, but because of lower grades earlier on, the overall GPA is lower than your average reflected in more recent course work. Ask the colleges how that is factored into their decision. Keep in mind colleges that get LARGE volumes of applications, and must have some initial sorting process. Is your application easily eliminated because of a lower GPA from your 9th & 10th grade grades?
5. **NYS Regents Exams** – How are these exams considered as part of my academic record? Particularly when applying to **SUNY & CUNY** colleges they may use your NYS Regents scores as part of their admissions rubric. Ask the representatives specifically how NYS Regents are calculated into admissions decisions.

College Policies/Resources

1. Can a student acquire actual **college credit** for a college class, or an AP class, and what is the capped number of college level credits a student may transfer to a college?
 - Some colleges impose a cap on the number of college credits they accept. Colleges typically do not issue AP credit unless you attain a 4 or 5. Ask these questions!
2. When colleges speak about **class size** make sure you ask about FRESHMAN class size. Eventually classes get smaller as you move through college, but often freshman classes can be very large. Decide if this is an issue of concern for you. Remember: You are use to a very small school, any college will seem large.
3. **Conditional acceptances** – Many colleges offer students a “conditional acceptance.” This usually occurs when the college is interested in offering you admission, but your academic profile may be slightly below than that required of the college. Another case may be that there were too many qualified applicants. Ask what kind of **conditional acceptance** programs are offered? Some examples may be a “January Acceptance”, an alternate housing option, starting college on academic probation, mandatory tutoring, assigned to a particular college, program or major that was not your initial preference.
4. **Universities comprised of several schools and competitive programs**- Many large universities such as Cornell, Georgetown, and SUNY Stonybrook are comprised of multiple schools and or “restricted majors/programs.” In some instances you will be applying to a separate college within a university that has its own admissions requirements. In other cases it may be a specific “restricted” program where you need to have higher grades or test scores in a specific area like math. At some universities like Cornell you may have the option to select a second choice school on the application. At some universities students can later transfer between schools should their course of study change. Whatever the case may be know the RESTRICTIONS/POLICIES of the university.
5. **Transferring into a new college** - Most students are not usually thinking this far ahead. However, students don’t always get into a desired college initially, and might possibly transfer in the future (data clearly supports this fact). Also, many students transfer for a variety of reasons such as money, program choice and overall social satisfaction. Ask prospective colleges what their policy is regarding transfer students. Many colleges often require 24 completed college credits before a student may

transfer into the college. Moreover, even after two years at a college your high school transcript may be requested. Find out each college's policy on how they deal with transfer students. Your high school record may follow you longer than you think!

6. **Early decision/Early Action** Ask the college to spell out all of their options for applying to a college **early**. You should have an understanding of what percentage of the incoming class has been accepted via an early program. Also ask about the academic profile of students accepted early vs. students accepted regular decision. Was there any variation?

7. What is the annual expected **increase in tuition**? What percentage has the tuition increased each year? Does the college offer tuition guarantee (a locked in rate)?

8. **Career Services** – In this day and age where internships are so important inquire with each prospective college about their career services. How do they assist students with internships? Can you schedule appointments regularly? What type of assistance is available for resume writing? Is the career center integrated with different academic departments on campus?

9. **Retention Rates at Colleges** - When prospective college students begin looking for their future homes, one statistic they may want to evaluate is a school's freshman retention rate. This information—how many first-year students return to campus the following year—can be an important indicator in determining whether freshmen are satisfied with their experience at a particular school. (Ryan Lytle, Aug 2011).

Testing

1. **Test optional schools** many great colleges have become TEST optional. This is a great opportunity for very strong students who happen to be weak test takers. At HSAS all students typically submit their test scores. Keep in mind if a college is “Test Optional” it makes a loud statement about how that college values standardized test scores. REMEMBER your academic profile is the marriage between your GPA and SAT/ACT score. That marriage is valued differently by colleges. Make sure to ask this question!!

2. **SAT vs. SAT Subject tests** – Your SAT subject tests seem to be much stronger than your individual SAT scores. Will this factor in positively at a college?

3. **SAT Writing** - The SAT Writing section has been on the exam for about eight years now. Many colleges do not fully consider this portion of the exam. Ask colleges how they are specifically utilizing the writing portion of the SAT. Is your SAT score considered in its entirety, or in separate sections?

4. **NEW SAT Class of 2017** it was recently announced in March 2014 that the College Board will be releasing a NEW exam Spring of 2016. A new PSAT will be introduced in the fall of 2015. Ask colleges how they regard these new changes. Are most colleges in agreement with the need for these changes?

A side note about testing: **SAT/ACT preparation classes** - When is the best time to take such a class? SAT preparation courses are usually given in 5-6 week intervals prior to a test date. More often than not students will take an SAT course prior to ever taking the test. Initially it is recommended that students first review their PSAT scores to determine if there was a struggle with content vs. strategy. Since most students take the SAT more than once, some students may benefit by first taking the SAT in January/March of Junior year (evaluate the outcome) then take a prep course and repeat the test in May or June. Some students will not find the need to take a preparation class. Research shows that repeatedly taking timed practice tests helps to improve scores. Many students who are disciplined can work on their own.

Essay

1. **Essay** - Ask the presenter at the information session (usually a person involved in reading applications) to cite some examples of impressive essays. Try to get a feeling of how much a college values the essay. Also don't forget to ask about supplemental (not required at many colleges) essays and their importance to your application.

2. **Essay word limitations** - “less is more” Ask the college how firm they are on word limitations. Sometimes college applications demonstrate how well one can follow directions. Giving more than what's asked for in some cases can work negatively against you (“over-kill”) and create unnecessary work for college personnel. Ask these questions!