

COURSE SELECTION ISSUES FOR COLLEGE-BOUND JUNIORS

from the NHS College & Career Center

In addition to *Northgate's Guide to Program Planning*, Juniors and their families should consult *Class of 2010 College Information*, which summarizes college testing, application, transcript procedures, etc., and will be posted at the NHS web site in February. Feel free to call (ext. 3525) or e-mail me (brandsp@mdusd.k12.ca.us) with your individual questions. I can generally provide a more thoughtful and comprehensive answer via e-mail.

UC/CSU ELIGIBILITY FOR ADMISSION

In order to be eligible for admission to University of California and California State University campuses, students must complete a minimum of 15 specifically required college preparatory courses with semester grades of C or better. Grades of D or F (including D or F grades earned during the freshman year) must be replaced. Juniors who have not replaced unsatisfactory grades can do so at the district summer session, by re-enrolling in the class as a Senior, space permitting, or by taking a community college course that covers the same material (Math 120 - Intermediate Algebra at DVC = Algebra II at NHS). First semester D grades do not need to be replaced if the course is highly sequential, and a C or better is earned the second semester: mathematics or foreign language. However, a first semester grade of D earned in math or foreign language during tenth or eleventh grade that has not been replaced will be included in the GPA calculated for college admission, and in the GPA used to qualify students for the state financial aid program (Cal Grants).

THE UNIFIED UC/CSU SUBJECT REQUIREMENTS

The California State University system and the University of California now have identical subject requirements, although there are some subtle differences in how these requirements are interpreted by the two systems, and a few ongoing areas of confusion. Both systems now require a Visual or Performing Art class for admission: year-long courses in studio art, ceramics, photo, drama, film, dance and music qualify at Northgate High School. ROP Video Production and ROP Art & Animation are also acceptable. Courses that *do not* satisfy the "VPA" requirement include aerobics, commercial art, speech, or foreign language, which is a separate requirement for admission. Please do not confuse the Mt. Diablo Unified School District graduation requirement of one year of **foreign language or fine art** with college admission requirements. The University of California and CSU will accept a 3 or 4 unit course at the community college to meet the "VPA" requirement. Students must also complete two years each of college prep social studies and laboratory science for both UC and CSU admission. Earth Science II provides CSU-bound students with an alternative to chemistry or physics for meeting the CSU physical science requirement. UC specifically requires chemistry or physics. See page 21 of the *Guide to Program Planning* for detailed information about the "a - g" subjects required for UC/CSU admission.

THE SENIOR YEAR PROGRAM

College-bound Seniors should be enrolled in a *minimum* of four academic, college preparatory classes. In addition to the required classes in English and Social Studies, Seniors should continue to take mathematics. Math skills deteriorate rapidly, and more college majors require Calculus and/or Statistics than in the past. Advanced Placement Statistics offers an alternative for Seniors who would prefer to enroll in an applied mathematics course. CSU-bound Seniors who do not take a fourth year of math may not be prepared to pass CSU's *Elementary Level Math* examination, a required placement test. DVC-bound Seniors who do not take a fourth year of math may place into high school level math classes at the community college, rather than transferable college courses. Seniors are expected to maintain their grade point averages throughout the final year of high school, or offers of admission may be rescinded. Every Senior is required to send an official, eight-semester transcript to the college he or she plans to attend when final grades are available in June, 2010.

MDUSD College Night is scheduled at College Park High School on April 2nd. Representatives from UC, CSU, DVC, and a private college will discuss admission to their respective sectors. Plan to attend the **East Bay College Fair** on April 25, 2009, 1-4:30 PM at Saint Mary's College, too! A dozen workshops for parents are offered throughout the afternoon of the fair, starting at 1:15 PM, in addition to representatives from more than 150 colleges nationwide (plus a few from other countries). Unfortunately, the fair is the same day as Junior Prom this year, but even an hour at the fair will be worthwhile, as long as the student arrives before long lines start to form at the tables of popular colleges. So plan to arrive by 12:45, and have a plan of action!

PLANNING AHEAD FOR COLLEGE ADMISSION

Juniors are encouraged to start their college searches by registering at *My College QuickStart*. The PSAT Score Report includes registration instructions and an access code. Spring break is an excellent time to visit colleges of interest, as most colleges are in session. In April, I will present information for Juniors during Study Sessions that will address getting organized for the fall application season, college selection, putting together an effective application for either college and/or scholarships, applying to college through an early action or early decision program, and college visits and interviews.

COLLEGE TESTING

The class of 2010 will qualify for admission to the University of California based on an eligibility index, which takes into consideration grade point average in college preparatory classes, SAT Reasoning Test or American College Test with Writing scores, and two SAT Subject Test scores. The two SAT Subject Test scores must be from different categories: Literature, History, Science, Foreign Language, or Math (Math Level 2 only; UC will not accept the Math Level 1 test). In other words, an applicant can meet the requirement by submitting a Biology score and a World History score, but not World History and U.S. History scores. Three Subject Tests can be taken on an SAT Saturday. Several of the *most* highly competitive private colleges will require or strongly recommend three SAT Subject Tests, one of which should be Math Level 2. It's not too soon to register for the April ACT, May SAT, or June SAT Subject Tests, at www.actstudent.org (ACT) or www.collegeboard.com (SAT Reasoning Test, SAT Subject Tests).

California State University campuses compute a college prep grade point average (utilizing the same formula that UC uses) for admission purposes. Only courses that appear on the UC approved course list can be included in the Cal State GPA calculation. Current Juniors are encouraged to go to the Cal State application web site, www.csumentor.edu, click on the "Plan for College" tab, then on "High School Planner." Enter your courses and grades to date to identify any subject deficiencies, and to expedite on-line application in the fall. The California State University system does *not* require a Writing test for admission, so CSU-bound Juniors can take the ACT without the optional Writing test (a shorter and less expensive test) for admission purposes. The SAT Reasoning Test now includes a mandatory Writing test.

I suggest that UC-bound Juniors take the SAT Reasoning Test in May (or the ACT in April), and the SAT Subjects Tests in June, as these one-hour achievement tests are designed to be taken at the end of a course of study. Subject Tests appropriately taken at the end of the Junior year include Math Level 2 (students enrolled in Pre-Calculus), U.S. History, a Science test, or a Foreign Language test if the student will not be enrolled in the language as a Senior. Visit testing web sites for registration details. The ACT is offered at College Park High School in Pleasant Hill in April; there is no conveniently located ACT test center in June.

I would like to see more NHS Juniors, particularly those who are CSU-bound, take the ACT (American College Test). The ACT is more closely aligned to high school curriculum than the SAT, which may result in a stronger performance than on the SAT (which was developed to predict college grades, rather than measure high school skill levels). Half of test takers perform significantly better on one test or the other, and colleges in California and throughout the country use the results interchangeably. The ACT without the Writing test is almost a full hour shorter than the SAT - a consideration for students with attention issues. Cal Poly - San Luis Obispo prefers the ACT.

PRACTICE SAT or ACT/SAT Combination Test, Saturday, February 21, 8:15 - Noon

Juniors who would like to test "off the record" one more time before the important spring test dates are invited to take a Practice SAT or ACT/SAT "combo" test on Saturday, February 21, 8:15 AM - Noon at Northgate. Scores will be reported promptly, so Juniors registered for the March SAT will receive timely feedback. Admission tickets will be sold in the *College & Career Center* at lunch, beginning January 28th, for \$15. Admission at the door, if space is available, will cost \$20.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT TESTS

Juniors planning to apply to selective private colleges, or to University of California campuses, will strengthen their college applications by taking appropriate Advanced Placement tests in May of the Junior year. AP registration will be through the NHS Treasurer's Office in February. The cost is \$92 per test, with an additional \$40 per test late fee for registration after February 17th. February 27th is the late registration deadline. March 2nd is the deadline to cancel an AP test and receive a refund, minus a handling charge. Students who are "no shows" for AP tests will not qualify for a refund, except in the event of an accident or illness. Fee waivers are available for students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; see Mrs. Brands for details. Juniors taking AP tests should plan to take comparable SAT Subject Tests in May or June, if available. Why spend all those hours preparing for the AP Biology test, and not take the SAT Subject Test in Biology, too!

Patricia Brands, College Counselor