The High School Transcript

Grades in academic subjects are the single best predictor of success in college, and colleges look for evidence that a student has undertaken rigorous coursework. The transcript must clearly indicate AP®, IB, and honors courses because these are key indicators of demanding classes. So for most students, the transcript is the most important document in the college application process.

COURSES

Do what you can to ensure that the names of your courses are crystal clear to colleges. You don’t want a college admission committee wondering why a student took “Youth Conflict” in their senior year instead of English when that happens to be the name of the English class the student took.

GPA

Most colleges recalculate GPAs. In her monograph Admissions Decision-Making Models, Gretchen Rigol explains:

Because there is no uniformity in the way high schools calculate a student’s overall grade point average (GPA), many institutions recalculate the GPA. In some cases, the GPAs are “weighted,” with extra points being given for honors or Advanced Placement® courses. In other cases, the GPAs are all “unweighted,” with all courses treated equally and no extra points given for more challenging courses. Some institutions simply count the number of honors, AP, IB, and other advanced-level courses. And still others simply reorganize the transcript information so that it’s easy to see coverage by subject and/or trends over the student’s school career. ... Although labor intensive, this customization helps institutions evaluate all applicants on a similar basis. It also has the advantage of making the information easily available for use in other forms, such as in an academic index and for placement reports for individual applicants, and for general summaries of the preparation of the applicant pool as a whole.

CLASS RANK

If your school does provide class ranking of students, make sure your ranking policies are clear and that you explain any weighting policies you may have. Although colleges require different academic information, most large state universities require applicants to report class rank (as do many scholarship programs) and rely on it to help them sort through the high volume of applications received.