

# Homeschooling Teens - Preparation for College

Originally published in the November-December 2006 VaHomeschoolers Newsletter. This article and more teen related articles can be found online at [www.vahomeschoolers.org/guide/teen/](http://www.vahomeschoolers.org/guide/teen/)

It's becoming rather common to find newspaper and magazine articles about how colleges are seeking homeschoolers.

"Homeschooled students, by and large, are a liberal arts college's dream," says Sabena Moretz, associate director of admission at the University of Richmond. "We want more students who think outside the box and color outside the lines. Homeschoolers often have developed into self-directed learners. Traditional high school students sometimes lack that trait."

Moretz was speaking to a writer for Richmond Now, her university's newspaper, but she echoed those thoughts at the Homeschool to College seminar held in Alexandria recently, a free event sponsored by the Organization of Virginia Homeschoolers.

The internet is full of positive articles about how colleges view homeschoolers. *Homeschooled Students Take Unorthodox Route to Become Top College Candidates* in the Pittsburgh Post Gazette (May 2000) or an article in Stanford's Magazine, *In a Class by Themselves* by Christine Foster (Nov/Dec 2000) are just two of the gems. For another good article there is *Homeschooled Applicants* by Matt McGann (admissions officer for MIT) (September 5, 2006). Links to these articles are included at the end of this article.

## Assessments

While colleges are becoming more accepting of home-generated transcripts, they still seek independent evaluations of academic preparation. Fortunately there are many ways to document a student's readiness for college courses.

SAT and ACT exams are only one example. While a number of colleges are dropping those requirements for traditionally schooled students, they are still looking at such test scores for homeschoolers. However, a number of schools, like JMU and George Mason are not looking at the new SAT writing component. The University of Richmond uses it instead of the SAT II. JMU only looks at the SAT's critical reading and math composite score.

Other assessment tools include:

- Taking community college courses under Dual Enrollment.
- Advanced Placement exams. Homeschoolers may study independently for these. The courses do not have to be taken through a school.

Other schools use essays and personal interviews to get to know homeschooled applicants.

Don't go into the process playing defense. Moretz, who has a homeschooled niece working on the college application process now, said that while the burden of proof is on the parent and the student, "When we ask questions, it is to find out what your preparation was, not to say anything about homeschooling."

## Coursework

- What level of work was done in each course, what took place in *your* environment.. Admissions officials know how individual high schools rate, but each homeschool environment is a school unto itself.
- Listing materials used and the credentials of instructors is helpful. A chemistry lab course taught by a bright, creative parent is nice, but if that parent has a background in teaching college chemistry or working as a chemist in a major company, admissions officials will take notice.
- Watch out for depth vs. breadth, said Moretz. While a student may devour everything possible pertaining to history, that doesn't let him off the hook when it comes to meeting foreign language requirements.

## Transcripts

Since homeschoolers do not come with the typical class ranking or GPA, they need to find an effective way to present their academic studies, community service and sports activities. How that is done is very subjective. Some folks prefer a year-by-year description, while others prefer a transcript based on subject areas, regardless of in what order they were taken. A portfolio of work done, with a more essay-like approach, has gotten several

homeschoolers into the University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary. Laika Tamny of JMU likes to see reading lists.

Many colleges are using the online "common application" and that's a fine place to start. However, homeschoolers should not be shy about supplying additional information.

When in doubt, ask the college what format they prefer, but remember that while many admissions officials still want homeschoolers to fit into the little boxes on a traditional application form, attitudes are changing. What you are told this year may be totally different in two years. It's an evolving process.

One state college admissions director said that homeschoolers don't come with the typical laundry list of activities seen from traditionally schooled students, but they show a passion and depth of involvement for those activities they've chosen, far beyond the average student.

Let that passion and involvement shine through in documentation of such activities. Essays - along the likes of "how homeschooling worked for me" are increasingly used to evaluate the non-traditional student and that format can really work to your advantage.

### **Ask the College!**

Make this your mantra through the whole process. Don't guess what your target institutions want, ask them. And, students don't have to wait until applications are submitted to go for an interview. Chatting with admissions before the process begins will help focus energies.

"Know what's expected so you're not playing catch-up in your junior or senior year," said Eddie Tallent of George Mason University.

### **Grades?**

Should you assign grades? Some families use a standard grading scale while others don't assign grades at all. College officials were unanimous in saying that if parents do assign grades, be sure to tell them what parameters were used.

They also cautioned that scholarship opportunities could be jeopardized by not giving grades. Again, check out potential merit scholarship opportunities ahead of time so you are not left unprepared.

### **An Associate's Degree First?**

Spending two years at a community college before heading off to university no longer has the stigma it once had. Diane Reukauf of Northern Virginia Community College said that the stereotypical college experience of going straight into a four-year institution is only what 49% of freshmen do. And, think of the money you'll save by taking the community college route first.

A terrific tool showing which community college courses transfer to Virginia schools is at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's website ([www.schev.edu/](http://www.schev.edu/)). Not all community college courses are listed, so if you're concerned about one, *ask the college*.

### **Keeping Records**

Pat LeDonne, Director of Admissions at Randolph Macon Women's college (soon to be coed), said that one criticism of homeschooled applicants is "we often don't have as much information as we would like."

There are a number of on-line programs to help you keep records as your student makes his or her way through high school. However, one very simple way is to keep a small file box, like a recipe box, filled with notecards. At the end of each day, have your teen get in the habit of jotting down the day's accomplishments on separate cards and date them. When it comes time to pull together a transcript, you'll have a good record of outside classes, seminars, conferences attended; field trips taken; books read; projects completed; plays attended or other programs watched; awards earned; volunteer service hours, apprenticeships, and work experience. It will be easy to sort the cards into subject areas.

The bottom line is, as Moretz said, homeschoolers are attractive to colleges because "We like meeting so many students who have not felt the pressure to conform." Lisa Branson of Mary Baldwin College said, "We are looking for those with the potential to be leaders."

Check out *Colleges That Admit Homeschoolers FAQ* ([http://learninfreedom.org/colleges\\_4\\_hmsc.html](http://learninfreedom.org/colleges_4_hmsc.html)). It's obviously not a comprehensive list, but has some good information.

### **What About Dual Enrollment?**

One of the easiest ways to acquire objective assessments of a homeschooled student's ability to do college level work is through Dual Enrollment at the local community college.

Not only will a high school age homeschooler get "official" grades to show for their efforts, but in Virginia, grades of C or better in many classes will transfer as college credits (although some colleges only accept credits if the grade was B or better). When in doubt, *ask the college*.

Dual Enrollment is for high school students aged 16 to 18 years-old, but some community colleges will allow younger students. It's up to the student, not the parent, to make the case as to why he or she should be admitted at an earlier age, although a parent must give written permission for any student under 18 to attend.

At Northern Virginia Community College (NVCC) applying for dual enrollment involves meeting with a counselor and presenting a copy of the school superintendent's acknowledgement of receipt of the parents' Notice of Intent to homeschool. Then the student takes the college's entrance exams. NVCC limits dual enrolled students to two courses a semester but a high grade on the entrance exams qualifies them for honors courses.

For a list of other community college's requirements for dual enrollment, see Virginia Community College Policies Toward Homeschoolers ([www.vahomeschoolers.org/support/cc.asp](http://www.vahomeschoolers.org/support/cc.asp)). Remember, these are constantly changing, so when in doubt, *ask the college*.

And, one final note: unlike public school students who often have their courses paid for, in Virginia, homeschoolers must pay their own way under dual enrollment.

### **Referenced Articles**

Homeschooled Students Take Unorthodox Route to Become Top College Candidates  
[www.post-gazette.com/regionstate/20000501homeschool5.asp](http://www.post-gazette.com/regionstate/20000501homeschool5.asp)

In a Class by Themselves  
[www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2000/novdec/articles/homeschooling.html](http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2000/novdec/articles/homeschooling.html)

Homeschooled Applicants  
[www.mitadmissions.org/topics/apply/homeschooled\\_applicants\\_helpful\\_tips/](http://www.mitadmissions.org/topics/apply/homeschooled_applicants_helpful_tips/)