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Good Planning Is the Key to College Success

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

Students and their families don't need me to tell them that it is a different world today than it was 20 years ago. As we adjust to new economic and social realities, we also must adapt to the changing landscape of attending college. Planning for college was always important and it is even more important now. Good planning is critical to success, especially if students are going to public institutions of higher learning. As one example, seniors who applied to the University of California and California State University systems faced more enrollment caps, earlier deadlines, and less flexibility regarding adherence to admission requirements. The new rules are, "Be on time and be complete!"

— Newly admitted students must plan well to maximize their educational experience and increase chances to graduate on schedule. This is particularly critical now because budgetary constraints have led to fee increases and fewer course sessions. Here are some tips:

— Consider attending school year round; newly accepted students may want to take courses during the incoming quarter before the beginning of the freshman year and during summers to get and maintain a strong academic edge

— Register as soon as an electronic bulletin comes out to maximize chances of getting the classes you want. Many public universities are cutting the number of class sessions offered in order to save dollars, and this trend is expected to continue.

— Consider enrollment at more than one college (for example, take classes at a local community college as well as the California State University you are attending).

— Think about taking an on-line course. For students who can learn in this environment, these courses present a way to maximize enrollment and stretch educational dollars.

— Get a good academic start, and do not fail or quit a class. Don't wait to experience a problem; instead take advantage of the help that exists on campus. Go to faculty office hours, check out peer tutoring, and join study groups.

— Get your text books and supplies early, be ready for the start of classes, and then consider taking a class just for fun to lighten your work; ping pong, yoga, step aerobics are one credit classes that provide a much needed break in a long school week.

— Finally, get an early jump on work study if it is offered in your financial aid package. If you plan your work study well every quarter (or semester), it will maximize your earning potential over the course of your college career.

— University of California Admissions Update for Current High School Students

Good planning means staying up to date with current information and policies. Fall 2009 applications rose for the fifth year in a row, increasing by 3.2% for freshmen. This represents a total of 127,000 applications. Due to the budget crisis, the UC system cut freshmen enrollment by 2,300, resulting in new enrollment caps at some UC campuses. When compared to fall 2008 figures, preliminary numbers show a reduction in admit rates at Davis, Irvine, San Diego, Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz. Merced and Riverside admit rates increased slightly, while Berkeley and UCLA remained flat.

When you look at the number of required courses for admission to the UC campuses, admitted students take more than the 15 year-long courses required for eligibility. Specifically, the average number of year-long college preparatory classes range from a high of 24.5 at Berkeley to a low of 22.5 at Riverside and Merced. These numbers mean that the UC campuses remain highly selective schools, and it is important to plan your high school years accordingly if you plan to apply. Challenge yourself with rigorous coursework at your high school while "protecting" your GPA. In other words, take challenging coursework that you can complete successfully with good grades. Remember that each campus does its own comprehensive review, taking into account courses offered at the high school you attended, as well as life circumstances, essays, extracurricular activities, employment and more. You are more than just a number! Stay balanced and keep college admissions in perspective. Remember that when you plan to meet UC requirements you are also planning to meet the requirements of many other fine public and private colleges and universities nationwide.



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