

Taking college courses in high school?

Here's how to make your choices have the most impact.

Are you considering earning college credit while you are still in high school? If so, you may be choosing from a variety of programs. You can

- take AP courses at your high school,
- participate in an International Baccalaureate program,
- enroll in Post-Secondary Option courses on a local college campus, or
- take dual enrollment/early college courses in a range of places—your high school, online, or on a college campus.

Earning college credit while in high school can be a great way to challenge yourself with advanced course work, try out college courses, and shorten the time (and cost) to a bachelor's degree. As you and your family make choices about early college experiences, consider the following guidelines.

General education courses

All Ohio public colleges and universities require students to take certain "general education" courses regardless of major. Because these courses are required of all students and because they transfer among all public colleges, general education courses are good choices for early college work. To see what courses fulfill general education requirements, visit the Ohio Board of Regents' website at regents.ohio.gov/transfer/tagcourses/otm.php.

Other courses may offer you exciting and challenging learning experiences, but if they do not fulfill a requirement at your chosen college or university, you will not shorten your time to earn a degree.

Choosing the "right" courses

Colleges and universities like Ohio State offer variations of some general education courses. For instance, Chemistry 1110, 1210, and 1610 all can fulfill a general education requirement at Ohio State. Which version you should take depends on your major. If you expect to major in a STEM field, you generally should choose higher numbered courses (1210 or 1610 rather than 1110).

Go to transfer.org to help you choose courses. At this site, you can enter courses you are considering taking and perform a degree audit to see if they are the most appropriate courses for you. You may also look at program descriptions for your intended major at majors.osu.edu.

Grades count

Trying out a college course can be a great experience, but earning a low grade can affect later applications to competitive programs within the college or university you attend. Often colleges and universities have policies that allow students to re-take a course to earn a stronger grade, but that will mean that you will take additional time once you enter college. These programs may be available only to students who have taken fewer than 30 semester hours.

Highly sequential majors

Graduating with a degree is more than completing a set number of credit hours. Some majors (such as engineering, the sciences, and healthcare fields like nursing) require students to take courses in a very strict order. Because those courses are offered at certain times of the year, early college course work may not help you to graduate in fewer than four years.

Asking for help

Remember that even smart students need to seek academic support at times, particularly when they are trying something new. Don't hesitate to use university tutoring and advising resources. All early college programs are

required to offer students the same kinds of academic supports they offer to traditional college students. It is better to get help early in a course than to try to undo damage to your GPA.

Satisfactory Academic Progress and financial aid

According to federal policies, college students must meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) in order to remain eligible for financial aid. SAP is reviewed using the following three factors:

- Grade point average. At Ohio State, students must maintain 2.0.
- Course completion rate. At Ohio State, students must complete a minimum of 67% of all the courses they attempt.
- Overall time to complete a degree. The number of credit hours necessary to graduate can vary with each program. At Ohio State, students can exceed the number of credit hours by no more than 150%, which includes any credits earned through an early college program..

Credit you earn in high school is factored into your SAP. So keep in mind that if you "try out" a number of college courses in high school but do not successfully complete them, your GPA and/or your completion rate can be negatively affected, making you ineligible for financial aid. If you take a number of college courses in high school without a clear vision of how they will count toward college requirements (general education or major), your maximum time to degree can be negatively affected, making you ineligible for financial aid at later stages of your college career.

Your transition to college

While early college programs offer you the opportunity to learn the content of college-level courses, there are additional factors that are part of most students' transitions to traditional college. You will experience some of the transition to college in your early college program, but you will still need to adapt to other factors when you attend college full time.

Pace: Traditional college courses move at a faster pace than many high school courses. In Ohio public colleges, one course is taught over a 14-week semester rather than an entire academic year.

Rigor: Traditional college courses have higher expectations for successful work than high school courses. Taking early college courses alongside traditional college students may help you adjust to that rigor.

Course format: Traditional college courses may be taught in a variety of formats: large lecture courses matched with smaller discussion sections, online lectures, etc. These courses meet two or three times per week, rather than every day.

Navigating college campuses and offices: When you attend college, you will need to work with a variety of people, offices, and support services across campus to become a successful college student. You'll meet with advisors to schedule courses, pay fees through the Student Service Center, take advantage of academic support programs such as the Writing Center or the Mathematics and Statistics Learning Center, and more.

Critical thinking and independent problem solving: Successful college students take responsibility for their own learning by solving problems and asking for support. They manage their time effectively to accomplish college assignments that may require multiple stages for completion.

More information

Go to ugeducation.osu.edu/dual-enrollment.shtml to learn about dual enrollment at The Ohio State University or contact your guidance counselor to find out about early college opportunities offered at your high school.