

An E-mail from a Former MSJHS Student and UC Berkeley Admissions Worker Regarding the Study of Music Throughout School

Hopkins Music Students & Parents,

I currently work in Admissions at the Haas School of Business at UC Berkeley. I also have a certificate in College Admissions Advising from UCLA, and have worked as a private college admissions counselor for nearly 8 years now. I personally was involved in the music program at Hopkins and Mission throughout my time there, and have volunteered with the music programs here for nearly 12 years while taking AP & honors classes. So here are some important facts to consider:

1. Colleges want to see dedication from their students, this means participating in programs for all 4 years in high school. Band and Orchestra is an excellent way to show this because not only is it a class at school it's also an extra-curricular activity. Taking something for 1-2 years and quitting is one of the worst things you can do. This applies particularly to Juniors, who drop a lot of their extracurricular activities in 11th grade to study for the SAT, this is VERY bad as it signals to the schools that you can't handle it.
2. Colleges want to see awards and honors, in an ideal world, this would be a perfect spread of academic, volunteer, and extra-curricular awards, as well as a split between individual and group awards. Band is great, because each year the group enters 3-5 marching competitions and additional CMEA Festivals, which basically guarantees you about 15-20 awards to list on your college application. Orchestra also participates in multiple festivals and competitions each year.
3. Taking music classes shows teamwork, another key trait that colleges are looking for in their students.
4. When calculating a weighted GPA for the UC system, only 8 semesters (4 full year long courses) are counted towards a weighted GPA in the 10 & 11 grade years combined. **This basically means that taking more than 4 AP or honor classes total in 10th grade and 11th grade combined won't benefit your GPA.** (Granted it will still look good to take more, there is no GPA benefit).
5. AP tests are designed to help families save money by skipping courses in college. **Most colleges do not weigh the score you get on an AP exam very high if at all.** The reason is that across the nation most students don't take AP courses till their senior year, and with scores being released in June (3-4 months after admissions decisions are released), they can't factor this in.

While this varies from student to student, I've found that the average student I know who has gone to UC Berkeley, UCLA, UCSD, etc. have about 5 AP classes (Ranging 4-7) in their 4 years at MSJ. This is basically AP English, AP Calculus, 2 AP Sciences (Bio, Chem, or Physics; one taken 11th grade and one in 12th grade), and AP Psych or AP Stats usually. For students taking more, it's usually AP US History, and/or a language) Regardless it is completely possible to take a 4 year courseload at MSJ involving all of these courses as well as Band or Orchestra. I believe Mr. Conway has already sent out some samples, but let me know if you have additional issues with this.

6. Colleges are looking for a well-rounded applicant, someone who is good in academics, arts, sports, volunteering, etc. Focusing all of your attention on academics does not make for a well-rounded student, and taking one art class your senior year is too late to try to cover up this flaw. Students should aim to participate in all activities throughout their time in high school in order to remain well rounded.
7. There are a number of leadership positions in the music programs which you won't be able to get in any academic class at MSJ. (Drum Major, Color Guard Captain, Drum Captain, Rank Captain, Concertmaster, etc.) After academics, leadership is the single next most valued aspect in the admissions process. In fact of the last 10 Drum Majors, 6 went to UC Berkeley. So why not take a class where you can get leadership experience as part of the class?
8. With regard to foreign language requirements, colleges consider the level you are taking as the number of years of foreign language you've completed. For example if you take Chinese 3 your freshmen year, you are considered to have 3 years of Chinese. Passing level 3 for any language is considered more than sufficient for admission purposes, and means that you do not need to take foreign language in college at nearly every university in the US. For those of you taking Chinese school outside of MSJ, you can simply take Chinese 4 one year, and earn 4 years of credit.
9. Band/Orchestra is an easy A! As long as you turn in practice charts, go to performances, and take your playing tests, there is no reason you shouldn't be able to get an A in the class. This does boost your GPA unless you've already got straight A's...

These are just some of the big points to consider, not to mention the benefits of a music education which has seen quite a bit of research in the last few years. At the end of the day, I was personally admitted into every UC school and received scholarships to attend UC Berkeley where I earned my degree in Molecular and Cell Biology followed by a full ride scholarship to UCSD's Rady School of Management where I earned my MBA as the youngest student in my class. Throughout all of this, I was highly involved with the music programs here in Fremont, and it is by no means a detriment to students looking to go to top colleges. If anyone has concerns they can feel free to discuss them with me.

Harrison Cheng
MSJHS Class of 2004
UC Berkeley Class of 2008
UC San Diego, MBA 2010
Admissions Advisor
Haas School of Business - University of California, Berkeley
Harryc@gmail.com