

Summary of the Hanover Research Council's Study on Standards-Based Grading and College Admissions

In January 2009, Hanover Research Council conducted a study for QCSD on the relationship between standards-based grading and college admissions. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the reaction of college and university admissions offices to report cards based on standards-based grading. The Hanover discussion involved a brief overview of standards-based grading, its history, and an examination of perceptions of standards-based grading by colleges.

The Hanover Research Council traced the advent of standards-based grading back to 1989. With the recent increase in the use of standards-based grading across the nation, college admissions departments are receiving transcripts based on grading practices that emphasize the academic standards. The Hanover Research Council profiled a number of top-ranked and regional institutions regarding their attitudes on standards-based grading.

The research included feedback from the following top-ranked institutions:

Harvard University
Princeton University
Yale University
MA Institute of Technology
Stanford University
California Institute of Technology
University of Pennsylvania
Columbia University
Duke University
University of Chicago
Northwestern University
Cornell University
Brown University
Emory University
Vanderbilt University
Carnegie Mellon University
University of Virginia

The Hanover Research Council found that most top-ranked American institutions rely on a number of student characteristics in awarding admission: the student's high school courses and achievement (favoring Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and introductory

college courses), grade point average, class rank, standardized testing, and a wide variety of other variables that individual institutions find important for their university.

On a regional level, the research included feedback from the following institutions:

Bloomsburg University
Bryn Mawr College
Queens College (City University of New York)
Elmira College
Pennsylvania State University
Rutgers University
Seton Hall University
Binghamton University (State University of New York)
Syracuse University
Temple University
University of Buffalo
University of Delaware
University of Maryland – College Park

For all types of colleges, high school course selection has become a more important criterion for admission for a number of reasons. According to the report, GPA relevance is debatable due to widely varying grading scales and weighting practices among high schools. Colleges and universities look for some of the following types of information from high schools to help them navigate discrepancies:

- Background from the guidance department on the high school's students, grading scales, and academic rigor.
- Evaluation of a high school's past students and their success at the institution.
- GPA recalculation based on specific core courses.
- GPA recalculation to exclude or include weight for honors, Advanced Placement, or International Baccalaureate courses.
- Required or recommended interview with an admissions officer, in person or via the Internet.
- Visits to high schools, where officers can meet with guidance counseling staff

Conclusion:

The Hanover Research Council report states that “Generally, admissions offices treat all grades as welcome indicators of high school performance while implicitly acknowledging that every school has a unique perspective, student body, and system.” None of the college admissions offices contacted expressed a concern or a negative view of a transcript based on standards-based grading.