

COX MILL HIGH SCHOOL
Student Support Services Tip Sheet
TOPIC: Academic Rigor

The following observations and insights on academic rigor and school success provide insights from high school honors and AP teachers and college professors. If you find this information sheet too cumbersome, long or boring to read, you should probably not take Honors, AP or CCP courses. Those classes are loaded with reading and independent learning that will require you to stay focused, even when it is dry, factual or “boring.”

You don't run but wish you could finish a marathon? You would never begin a new hobby such as running by competing in a marathon. You would start by training, maybe joining a gym, and then move into competing in 5Ks, half marathons, etc. Only after working out, building up your stamina, and really getting to know your strengths and weaknesses as a runner would you consider signing up for a full marathon...to do otherwise would be foolish and potentially dangerous. The difference between a wish and a plan is that one is a *gamble* and the other is an *investment*.



The best predictor of college success is high school performance. This means it is essential that students choose the appropriate level courses in high school. A challenging course load is great, but only if a student has a solid foundation in prior courses, well-established academic skills and self-discipline.

Choosing the most rigorous course load **for your ability level** is an investment in your future. Some of us need to take regular courses, because that is what is most rigorous for our ability levels...others can handle a combination of regular and Honors...still others need a combination of Honors and AP to be fully challenged. There is no one formula for success. Doing well in regular courses will provide you with a better investment return than doing poorly in more rigorous courses. Choose what makes the most sense for you, your ability level, work habits, and future plans.



STANDARD COURSES: Course content, pace and academic rigor follow standards specified by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCoS). Quality points for the GPA calculation are assigned according to the standard 4.0 scale and receive no additional quality points.

HONORS COURSES: Course content, pace and academic rigor place **high expectations** on the student, demanding **greater independence** and **responsibility**. Such courses are more challenging than standard level courses and are distinguished by a **difference in the depth and scope of work required** to address the NCSCoS. Honors courses demand a tremendous amount of independent work, outside reading and writing, and each requires a three-page paper. The state course weighting system awards the equivalent of one-half (0.5) quality point to the grade earned in Honors courses. The Cabarrus County Schools guideline for Honors courses is an A in the standard level course that precedes it or a B in the honors level course that precedes it.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES: Course content, pace and academic rigor are considered **college level** as determined by the College Board and are designed to enable students to earn high scores on the AP test, potentially leading to college credit. AP courses demand a highly self-motivated student who is willing to do a tremendous amount

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of independent work and lots of reading outside of class, as well as analytical and reflective writing. The state weighting system awards the equivalent of one (1) quality point to the grade earned in an AP/IB course. The Cabarrus County Schools guideline for AP courses is a B or higher in the Honors level course that precedes it. Cox Mill High School does not recommend that students take an AP course without having had an Honors level course in that content area first.

CAREER & COLLEGE PROMISE COURSES (CCP): CCP or “dual enrollment” courses’ content, pace and academic rigor are, by definition, **college level** for these courses. Courses taken in the CCP **College Transfer Pathway** earn transferable college credit (UNC System) while also earning high school credit. The state weighting system adds the equivalent of one (1) quality point to the high school grade for CCP College Transfer courses. CCP is open to juniors and seniors only, and the State of North Carolina requires that students have a minimum 3.0 GPA and meet college-ready benchmarks (qualifying test scores) for entry into College Transfer Pathway courses. CCP also offers **Career Technical Pathway** courses, though they do not earn extra quality points and may not transfer to a four-year institution of higher education.



OTHER TIPS:

- If you are **just starting** out in Honors courses, choose to **take one or two in your favorite subjects** rather than taking four all at once, especially in your weakest subjects.
- **Jumping a level is not advisable.** Going from standard (regular) courses to AP is never a good idea. Try your hand at an Honors-level course in that content area first.
- Students are strongly advised to have a **discussion with their current teacher** in the proper content area before making the AP decision, especially in cases where the student does not meet the criteria or possess the necessary academic skills and foundational knowledge.
- **Consider all your responsibilities** and the larger context of your life when choosing rigorous courses; for example, consider how sports, clubs, job, relationships, etc. will also demand your time and attention as you determine how much time available to devote to rigorous courses.
- Be sure your **schedule is balanced** to include your hardest courses over the course of the year and not in one semester. If all the classes won’t fit nicely together in a balanced fashion, consider alternate choices instead of taking on more of a load than you can handle.
- **GPA points are not a valid motivator.** Don’t get hung up on the extra quality points as a deciding factor. Those points are important, but not as important as doing well regardless of the level of the course.
- **Consider the college’s perspective.** Some colleges treat AP and CCP courses differently. Some view them as equal while others view AP as being more rigorous. Check with the colleges on your interest list to be sure you are making the best choices to make you a viable applicant to those schools.
- **Dropping courses is not allowed.** Once you are in an Honors or AP course, there is no getting out of it, so make wise choices.
- **“I want to raise my GPA” should never be the reason** you choose Honors or AP courses. You should love the subject and want to challenge yourself, otherwise you are doing it for the wrong reasons.