



should you do a summer program?

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT
CAMPUS-BASED SUMMER COURSES

By Veena Patwardhan

What did you do last summer? Maybe you slept in until noon, killed time hanging out with friends, or just lazed in front of the TV scrolling through the channels. After all, there's nothing wrong with relaxing and having a good time.

But with college just a year or two away, wouldn't you be better off changing gears and getting into a more active mode? Yep, it's time you stepped out of your comfort zone and got busy preparing for the transition from high school to life on campus. One way you could make the most of this summer break would be by enrolling in a pre-college course.

But then, many of the on-campus summer programs come with a hefty price tag. Perhaps you're afraid you might waste good money on the wrong one. Or maybe you can't decide whether a pre-college summer program is for you. The details below can help you make an informed decision.

Types of pre-college summer programs

There are basically three types of programs.

Academic enrichment programs: These offer a range of traditional school subjects in the arts, humanities or the sciences that could enable you to further your career interests. For instance, the **Pre-College Summer Program at Johns Hopkins** in Baltimore, Md., has subjects ranging from art to applied mathematics.

You also have the option of exploring new territory by test-driving a subject you're interested in but have only briefly encountered, such as engineering or law. If you're a big fan of "Boston Legal" or "Law & Order," you could check out the **Pre-Law Summer Program at Dickinson College** in Carlisle, Penn. Their pre-law students take front-row seats in the county courthouse and participate in mock trials before a real judge.

At the **University of Rochester**, Rochester Scholars students from across the country can choose one "major" class that meets for two weeks and one "minor" class that meets for one week.

Specialty programs: If the thought of studying during summer gives you the creeps, then try your hand at non-academic activities like music, photography, creative writing, fashion design or theater. For example, if you're an aspiring shutterbug, you might be interested in the **University of Iowa's Summer Photography Workshop** in Iowa City, Iowa.

College-prep programs: These are focused on helping high school students navigate the complexities of the college application process and college interviews. One such program is the **Constructing Your College Experience (CCE) Program at Duke University** in Durham, N.C., which includes guidance in writing the college application essay, preparing for the college visit, and interviewing and SAT tips.

In addition to classes, most programs include weekend excursions and other fun activities. Some of the programs offer the advantage of earning college credit while you're still in high school. Others don't.

Jon Reider, director of college counseling at San Francisco University High School, says going to college with credits already is not necessary. "The value of a summer program is in the program itself, not its possible utility afterwards," he says. What year of high school would be the best time to register for a summer program? "Probably in the junior year, but whenever you are ready."

Are you eligible?

Although most summer programs are for ninth through 12th graders, some specify a minimum age of 15.

Admission to some programs is highly competitive. For example, to apply to the Johns Hopkins programs, you need at least a 3.0 GPA, a personal essay, your SAT, PSAT or ACT scores, high school transcript and teacher recommendations. So if you have your sights trained on such programs, you'd better get busy.

How long will it take?

The duration of summer programs may range from five days to six weeks or so. Jennifer Howland, assistant director of admissions and coordinator of pre-college programs at Dickinson College, says, "During our five-week programs, students take college-level courses that are typically run during a regular semester, but have been condensed for the summer season. The one-week programs are just as intensive."



Dawn London Blanchard

Dawn London Blanchard, director of the CCE Program at Duke University, says of their week-long course, "Among many other activities, we meet one-on-one with each camper and also take them on tours of other local colleges."

How much will it cost?

Costs vary depending on the length of the program, the activities involved, and whether the programs are offered by private summer schools or are supported by state or federal funding. But in general, the cost for a one-week program could vary from \$400 to \$1,500, while a five-week course could cost from \$1,250 to \$6,000.

Financial aid, though limited, is offered by many programs. A few programs are even free. For instance, the one-week **Women in Engineering** workshop offered by the Michigan Technological University in Houghton, Mich., is supported by scholarships valued at \$650 each. The scholarship covers all costs except registration and travel expenses.

Planning in advance is absolutely essential. So start researching the various courses early, and evaluate the available opportunities! 🦋

Take it from me

Summer programs are a fun way to preview campus life, particularly at a college you'd like to attend. As for the benefits, there are many—here are a few.

"The college-level, six-week course in philosophy at UC, Santa Barbara boosted my self-confidence, but it also showed me I was NOT interested in studying philosophy in college. As the course drew an ethnically and economically diverse group of students, it helped me understand the day-to-day realities of racism and inequality, which in turn prepared me for analyzing race, class and gender in my academic work as a doctoral student." —Emily Hobson, doctoral student in American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of Southern California



Emily Hobson

"It's the experience of living in a dorm with other students who became my good friends that makes the Spanish immersion course I took at Dickinson College something I won't forget." —Addie Price, high school senior, Westover School in Middlebury, Conn.

"Besides enhancing a college application, the experience of being part of the college environment will teach students how to balance academics and a social life."
—Jennifer Howland, assistant director of admissions and coordinator of Pre-College Programs, Dickinson College in Carlisle, Penn.

"Campers are exposed to the college campus and lifestyle, peers in search of the right college for them, and expert advice from college and high school personnel."
—Dawn London Blanchard, director of Constructing Your College Experience Program at Duke University

"The main benefit is to experience the higher level of expectations and more sophisticated learning styles of college classes. It is also fun to live on a college campus for a while." —Jon Reider, director of College Counseling, San Francisco University High School in California.



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