

Summer School Learning Programs

Diversifying the High School Experience

Lots of high schools have mandatory summer school for students who have underperformed. But summer school can also mean attending classes at a college or an alternative institution — there are even some programs you might have to compete to get into.

A Variety of Programs and Benefits

There are summer programs in just about every area of study, from academic subjects to skills such as playing an instrument or a sport.

Pursue Your Interests

Summer programs can help you cultivate a talent or interest in the arts, humanities or sciences. For example, the [California State Summer School for the Arts](#), held on the campus of the California Institute for the Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, has programs in film and video, creative writing, visual arts, animation, dance, music and theater.

Meanwhile, the [Michigan Tech Summer Youth Program](#) allows you to participate in weeklong "Explorations" in science and technology, business, engineering, computing, outdoor and environmental studies, leadership, and a variety of social-science and humanities subjects.

Closer to home, check out your local performing arts centers, science museums and parks; many have summer programs where you can get hands-on experience in areas ranging from set design to environmental education.

Gain Experience Outside the Classroom

Summer school programs often involve a lot more hands-on learning than you'll find in your regular classes. Many residential summer school programs include sports, travel and social activities in their curricula. Personal development and leadership skills are also major themes.

For example, students at the [University of Wyoming Summer High School Institute](#) take a personal growth seminar, in addition to their academic classes.

Improve Your High School Transcript

Attending a challenging summer school program can increase your chances of getting into a competitive college. In fact, some summer school programs are as competitive as colleges, requiring an extensive application complete with PSAT/NMSQT® or SAT® scores, teacher recommendations and a personal essay.

While attendance at a high-powered summer school like [Harvard's Secondary School Program \(SSP\)](#) does not guarantee that you will get into an Ivy League school, it does add a certain luster to your college applications. However, a cutting-edge internship or a job that requires responsibility and leadership can look just as good on your applications.

Try Your Hand at Real College Work

If you're craving in-depth study of a subject and high school classes leave you wanting more, college-level classes may be the answer. And if you want to explore a particular college, or experience the pace, structure, and procedures of college classes, it's a great preview.

Call the colleges on your wish list and ask if they have a summer semester. If they do, ask them to send you a catalog.

Cost

Private summer schools can be expensive, but the good news is that [Governor's Schools](#) and similar programs supported by state and federal education funding tend to be more affordable — some are even free of charge, and most offer financial aid based on need.

If you come from a low-income family or you'll be the first member of your family to attend college, you may be eligible for an [Upward Bound TRIO program](#). You'll spend part of your summer at a nearby college, getting a preview of campus life while building skills and meeting other students from across your region.

Private summer schools, like the program offered at Harvard, also offer a limited amount of financial aid, so don't cross them off your list. Look into all your options first.

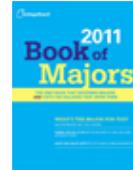
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When looking for a summer school program, here are some important factors to consider:

- How much of the summer do you want to commit to school? Programs range from five days to eight weeks.
- What do you want to get out of summer school? Your goal might be to improve your academic skills, act in a play, teach young children, learn how to conduct a political campaign, practice a second language or work with engineers in the computer industry.
- Where do you want to stay? You can find residential programs where you live in dorms with other students. In other programs, you live at home, attending school only during the day.
- Can you get high school — or college — credit for summer school courses? Receiving credit depends both on the school where you take the course and on your home school.
- How much can you spend on summer school? If the answer is nothing, see whether there are free programs available in your state or school district.

Bottom Line

When deciding whether summer school is right for you, you should consider what you want to learn and what type of summer program provides the best experience for it. For more advice and for information about specific programs, talk to your high school counselor.