

1. *What is the standard load for 9th graders? Can my child take six classes?*

Most 9th graders take six core academic classes each semester. These classes include a semester-long Ethnic Studies course, a semester-long History course, English, Math (based on placement), Physics, Language (based on placement & choice), and two semester-long Arts electives. A small number of students elect to wait to take their Arts elective at another time so they can use the extra time to focus on keeping up with the challenging academic curriculum; a few others take two Language classes in 9th grade. Students also take part in Responsive Education seminars in Health, Wellness, and Metacognition and participate in sports teams or other physical education opportunities after school.

2. *Is there an honors track in English, History, Math, or Science for Freshmen? How do you assure that students are sufficiently challenged?*

For several reasons, we do not “track” students in any discipline where all students can benefit from the same course of study. We believe strongly in the benefits of heterogeneous grouping, finding (in line with the best research) that students gain from every kind of diversity we can build into a class. Small classes (14 to 16 students per class), the chance to engage with a range of peers, and the opportunity to build close relationships with their teachers guarantee that even the most ambitious and prepared students are challenged throughout our curriculum.

3. *Are all arts electives open to 9th graders? Are some harder to “get” than others for a 9th grader? Can a 9th grader get into Chorus, Chamber Orchestra or Jazz Band?*

All introductory performing and studio arts classes are open to 9th graders. However, please note that students are not guaranteed any specific arts class, due to constraints on class size or scheduling conflicts. Enrollment in Chamber Orchestra, Jazz Ensemble, Jazz Combo, Chorale and Camerata is

contingent on auditions and the particular needs of the group that year, with priority given to students who have already auditioned or performed. In most of the performing arts, however, there are entry-level courses open to all 9th graders in which they will develop as musicians and vocalists – notably New Notes Ensemble, Acting I, Jazz Combo, and Chorale. Auditions for the Fall Play and the Spring Musical are held at the beginning of each semester and are open to all students.

4. *How are students placed in Math and Language classes? Can students appeal their placement? Can a placement be changed by taking a summer school course? What are the long-term consequences of these placements?*

Math and Language placements are based on the results of the placement evaluation, on performance in previous courses, and on recommendations from students' middle-school teachers. Our goal is that each student enrolls in a class that assures both success and challenge. These placements are not made competitively, and there isn't a limited number of spots for each level.

If a family appeals a placement decision, we will certainly re-examine the record. In cases where the results of the Math placement evaluation are borderline, the department may ask for additional mathematical work. Entering students should not plan to take a summer school course to adjust their placement. At any point in the year, if we discover that a particular placement is not serving the student, we will make the appropriate change.

Regardless of their initial placement, many counselors recommend that students take four years of mathematics and language, although we only require 6 semesters in each.

5. *Where are students with native or native-like fluency in a language typically placed?*

Students with native or native-like fluency can place as high as level 4, provided such fluency is in both speaking and writing. Spoken languages offer 6

levels, with the possibility of a combined 6-7 level or independent study in the students' senior year.

6. Can a student enroll in two language courses simultaneously? What are the implications down the line of such a decision?

Yes, students may enroll in two languages as early as ninth grade. Students must pursue 6 semesters of one of the two. Since UHS has a 6-period schedule, 9th graders enrolled in two languages may not enroll in most Arts courses while doing so. Therefore, we recommend that families speak with the Dean of Teaching & Learning before finalizing a plan to enroll in two languages in the 9th grade.

7. What computer and related skills do you recommend for entering 9th graders?

We are a "bring your own Apple device" school, meaning that we are best equipped to support students who use a Mac laptop. Fluency with the Google suite of apps for email, file management, calendar, etc. will be helpful. 9th graders should expect to be asked to draft, format, revise, and respond to comments in a Google Doc. Any time spent improving your touch-typing speed before starting high school is time well spent. More information is available on the Tech Team's [New Student Tech Guide](#).

8. What software platform do you use for courses?

We use the Canvas platform to host our classes. This platform is accessible through a web browser and also through a phone app. Students are advised to pin the Canvas dashboard tab in their browser for easy access, and to store passwords either in their Mac keychain or a manager like 1Password. We use Blackbaud Education Management for our student information system. We use Google for mail, calendar, documents, etc.

9. If my child plays after-school sports, will there be conflicts with academic classes?

Occasionally, students will need to miss all or part of a class for an athletic contest, but never for sports practice. In most cases, though, sports do not conflict with academic classes. We encourage students to work with their mentor and coaches to resolve conflicts between possible after-school teacher meetings and practice.

10. Do students stay with the same Mentor for four years? What if they don't "click" with their mentor? Do students change their Cluster?

Students maintain the same mentor for all four years of high school. The job of the mentor is to act as the "Big Red Help Button" for their student and to help them navigate the school. Not every student will "click" with their mentor, but that's ok: the job of the mentor is to be sure that the student is "clicking" with at least one adult on campus, and has the support they need to thrive.

Students do not change clusters - there are many opportunities for students to choose their friends, affinity groups, clubs, sports, etc., to find people they enjoy being around. What is special about cluster is that the students have *not* chosen one another, but will still form a diverse and supportive community together.

11. If I have questions about my program after today, whom do I call?

If you have a question about our academic program, please email Kate Wiley, Dean of Academics. If you have a question about student life, please contact Alexandra Simmons, Dean of Student Life.

Contact information

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