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All in the details:

Maximizing the activities & awards section

Agenda

- How activities & awards fit within comprehensive review
- Activities & awards overview
- Case studies
- Final tips and insight

Comprehensive review

- Grade-point average (GPA)
- Courses completed/planned
- AP, IB, UC-honors, transferable college courses
- Eligibility in the Local Context (ELC)
- Quality of senior-year
- Academic opportunities in school
- Achievements in special projects
- Geographic location
- Performance in academic subject areas
- Improvements in academic performance
- Special talents, achievements, and awards
- Participation in educational preparation programs
- Academic accomplishments within context of life experiences

- As each UC considers a student's application, we are going to look beyond grades and academics; because we understand students are more than the grades they receive. We want to understand the bigger picture and the activities and awards section gives students the opportunity to tell application readers what they are most proud of outside the classroom.
- <https://admission.universityofcalifornia.edu/how-to-apply/applying-as-a-freshman/how-applications-are-reviewed.html>
- We highlighted the areas of comprehensive review here in blue text because
 - These capture many non academic factors
 - Could be highlighted in the PIQs but we are focusing on these areas with the activities and awards section
 - For example, taking care of siblings could provide context of life experiences that tie back to how well the student is performing academically
 - AP Scholars could demonstrate performance academically
 - Educational prep programs like EAOP demonstrate students college preparedness

What is UC looking for?



Commitment

How long has the student been doing that activity?
How much time has been committed to it?



Progression

Has the student worked on a particular skill or activity?
Can they demonstrate growth over time?



Leadership

How has the student demonstrated leadership?
What roles have they held?

- Admissions officers/application readers are not looking for any particular activities, awards or accomplishments. Everything that the student chooses to share with us in this section will be valued equally. What will be most important are the details your students choose to share with us.
- There are three (3) things that we are looking for when reviewing the activities and awards section: Commitment (how long has the student been doing the activity and how much time has been committed to it), Progression (have they worked on a particular skill or activity and can they demonstrate growth overtime), and Leadership (how has the student demonstrated leadership and what roles have they held).



Activities & awards logistics

Quality over quantity

- Students can enter up to **20 activities & awards** across 6 different categories
- UC campuses have **no preference** for specific types of involvement

Activities & awards
Add activities & awards

* required

You can enter your activities and awards one at a time. First, select a category from the dropdown menu below. Once you've selected a category, you'll be able to tell us more about the activity or award in the follow-up questions.

Description of categories

Award or honors: We want to know about the awards and honors you've received that mean the most to you.

Educational preparation programs: Any programs or activities that have enriched your academic experiences or helped you prepare for college.

Extracurricular activity: These could include hobbies, clubs, sports or anything else you haven't had the chance to tell us about.

Other coursework: These are courses other than those required for UC admission (courses that do not fit in UC's A-G subject areas).

Volunteering / Community service: These are activities you've donated time and effort to without getting paid.

Work experience: This is for telling us about any paid jobs or paid internships you've had.

Activity/Award [1]

Category*

--select--

Save & continue Cancel

- Students have the ability to enter up to 20 activities and awards across six (6) different categories.
 - **Awards and Honors**
 - **Educational Preparation Programs:** Any programs or activities that have enriched a student's academic experience or helped them prepare for college.
 - **Extracurricular Activities:** These can include hobbies, clubs, sports or anything else that the student hasn't had the chance to tell us about. Students should be thinking about what they are doing when they are not sitting in class or sleeping.
 - **Other Coursework:** Academic courses that do not fit in the UC's A-G subject areas. Other coursework could include things like leadership courses, religious studies classes, career/vocational courses, and/or non-transferable community college courses. Students should not include non-academic courses like PE or office assistant/student aide.
 - **Volunteering/Community Service:** Activities in which the student has donated their time and effort without getting paid.
 - **Work Experience:** Paid jobs and paid internships. *Note:* Unpaid internships should NOT go in work experience. They should be entered within the volunteer/community service category.
- We often get asked by students, (1) "what category should **this** activity go under" and (2) "does the order of activities matter".
 - (1) Many activities can fit across multiple categories. Your student should not duplicate the activity across multiple categories; instead, they should consider which category they feel the activity is best suited.
 - (2) The order of activities does not matter. Depending on the application reading tool each campus is using, it may rearrange the activities and awards differently from how your

- student chose to enter the information.
 - The most important thing is that your student gets the information on their application.
- Reminder that UC does not have a preference for any specific type of involvement, nor do we expect students to have something under each of the six (6) categories or fill all twenty (20) spaces for activities and awards. The quality of the information shared for each of the activities or awards, or the time committed to each activity, is going to be more important than the number of activities and awards themselves.
 - Some students may only fill out a few activities and awards that all cluster around one type of activity, but the time dedicated to that activity is significant. We see this most often with student athletes or students involved in the arts. For example, you might have a student that plays soccer on both their school team and a travel team or a student that plays multiple musical instruments and has performed in the statewide honor band. What's most important for these students is that they accurately quantify the time commitment.

Image Alt Text: Screenshot of where one can submit their activity or award on the UC application.

Consistency and commitment

- Don't forget about senior year
- "After 12th grade" is meant for students who completed a gap year and for transfer students
- Use an average of hours spent on an activity if hours vary during the year

When did you participate in this activity? *

If you participated during the summer, select the grade you were in before that summer.

9th grade
 10th grade
 11th grade
 12th grade
 After 12th grade

How much time did you spend on this activity? *

It's ok to estimate, but try to be as accurate as possible.

Hours spent per week:

Weeks spent per year:

[Save & continue](#) [Cancel](#)

- For each category students will be asked to identify the years that they participated in the program or activity or received the award/honor. If students participated in an activity or earned an award during the summer, they should select the grade they were in before that summer. The Work Experience category will further allow students to differentiate between hours worked during the school year and during summer.
- Students should remember to include their planned activities for senior year - especially when it's something they have been continuously involved in. For instance, if a student has consistently been involved in a spring sport and plans to do that sport again in spring of the senior year, they can list it even though it hasn't yet occurred. Or, if you have a student that is actively working toward earning a selective award, honor, internship, etcetera, while completing their UC application, they can include this information, but they must provide clear and accurate details regarding their involvement and progress for this activity at the point of application submission. They should not insinuate that this is something that has been awarded or completed if that is not the case.
 - Sometimes these types of activities can cause timing issues with the application. Many students will wait to submit their application until they know for certain whether or not they have received the award, honor or internship, etcetera. Students always have the option of adding this information in the additional comments section of their application if they do not feel comfortable including it in the activities and awards space.
- Students are encouraged to average the hours of the activities if they vary during the year.
- We ask student to identify how much time was spent on the activity so that we have a better understanding of the commitment required to participate.

Details and content

- Students will have **60 characters** to name the activity
- **350 characters** to describe the activity
- Students should focus on ***their*** experience within the activity - what was their role, responsibility, etc.?
- Content > Formatting

What's the name of the activity? *

60 characters

What did you do? *

Think about your experience, and what you accomplished and learned. We'd also like to know if you've held a leadership role, which can mean more than just a title — it can mean being a mentor to others, acting as a point-person in charge of a specific task, or taking a lead role in organizing an event or project.

350 characters remaining

- In each category, students will have 60 characters to name the activity or honor. For clarity purposes, students should avoid using acronyms or abbreviations. If the name of the activity or honor is longer than 60 characters, they should type out as much as will fit.
- The educational preparation program section will have a drop down for students to select UC sponsored programs, but there is also an “other” option which will prompt the student to enter the name of the program.
- 350 characters are provided for students to describe the activity - specifically what they did or learned. Students are encouraged to think about their experience and their roles and responsibilities, and not necessarily describe the activity itself. For example, we don't need the student to share that football is a sport with 11 players on the field, tossing a ball, trying to score a touchdown. Students can also share in this section if they have participated in the activity for longer than just high school.
- When entering the details for each activity, students should focus on the content rather than the formatting. We have seen students present information in a more formal sentence structure, but also in a more bulleted format and both ways are acceptable.

Context matters

- Level of recognition
- **250 characters** for students to describe the organization or eligibility requirements for an award
- Use of earnings

The screenshot shows a form with two main sections. The first section is titled "Level of recognition *" and contains five radio button options: School, City / Community, State, Regional, National, and International. The second section is titled "Type of award or honor *" and contains two radio button options: Academic (for example Honor societies, academic competitions & programs, grade-based & department awards) and Non-academic (for example: Athletics, leadership, volunteering/community service). Below these sections is a text input field with a placeholder that says "Please tell us how you've used your earnings from all of the jobs you've listed. This information will NOT be used to determine financial aid -- rather, it gives us more context about you and your experiences." The input field has a character count of "250 characters remaining". At the bottom of the form are two buttons: "Save & continue" and "Cancel".

- For some of the categories, there are some differences you should be aware of.
- For the Honors and Awards section, students will also be asked about the type of award (academic versus non-academic) and the level of recognition (school, city/community, state, regional, national, or international).
- Within the volunteer and work experience categories students will be provided with an additional 250 characters to describe their organization and 250 characters are provided for the awards and honors section to discuss the eligibility requirements.
 - Again, this is in addition to the 350 characters provided for a student to describe their role in their activities.
 - When sharing eligibility requirements students should think about: How are award recipients chosen? How many people are selected to receive the award? Is there an application or nomination for the award?
- Within the work experience category, students will be asked how have they used or will they use their earnings. Many students will write things like they are saving for college, or they're required to pay for their car insurance or other personal necessities. This section can help give us a better idea if the student is working because they want to or if they are working because if they don't their family can't afford basic necessities.



Traditional vs non-traditional activities

Traditional versus non-traditional activities

- How does your student spend their time **outside of the classroom**?
- All activities are valued equally
- Activities do not need to be formal, nor do they have to be sponsored by a school



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- As students are completing this section, we encourage them to think about how they spend their time **outside of the classroom**.
- There is no such thing as a “bad” or “filler” extracurricular activity and everything that the student reports has the opportunity to add value to their application.
- As we work with diverse groups of students it’s important that we remember to be open-minded about the opportunities that they may have had available to them. Not all students have the ability to participate in competitive sports, to play a musical instrument, to star in their school play or to join school clubs and become leaders within those clubs.
- Some students may have had to be available to translate for their household or have significant family responsibilities and take care of family members, or have responsibilities and involvement related to their faith or cultural identity. Other students may be social media influencers or manage discord servers and twitch channels or show skill playing video games and so many other things some might consider “non-traditional” activities.
 - You might be thinking to yourself, did they really say that students could add video gaming to their application and yes, you heard that correctly. Years ago, we may not have encouraged student to add this type of activity to their application, but e-sports is now a multi-billion-dollar industry that continues to grow each year. Gaming can also provide students with a sense of community and allow them to show off their creativity.
 - **Twitch** is an interactive live streaming service for content spanning game, entertainment, sports, music and more.
 - **Discord** is a voice, video, and text chat app that can be used to talk and connect with their communities and friends.
- Regardless of the activity, it’s important that your student focuses on the details that they can provide the application reader and how that activity might show **commitment, progression, and leadership**.

How to address a lack of involvement

- **Context** is essential and can be found throughout the application
 - Activities and awards
 - Use of earnings
 - Additional comments
 - Personal insight questions



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- When addressing a “presumed” lack of involvement it’s important to ask the right questions. Often asking the student why they haven’t been involved will uncover things that could be impactful for our readers.
- If your student still feels as though they don’t have value to add to the activities and awards section, it is important that they address their lack of involvement somewhere in the application. For example, your student might share that they have family responsibilities, or health concerns, or long commutes to and/from school. It’s important that your student addresses that information in either their personal insight questions, additional comments sections or somewhere within the activities and awards section.
- One of the biggest mistakes your student can make is leaving the activities and awards section blank - which leaves the application reader with more questions than answers.



Case studies

Example 1: Honor or award

Honor/Award	Years Awarded	Level of Recognition
AP Scholar with Distinction	11 th Grade	Statewide
Description		
I took seven AP tests, 5 were offered as school classes and 2 were self-studied. I self-studied AP Environmental Science (9th) and Biology (10th).		
Eligibility Requirements		
This award is given to students who meet two criteria with their AP exams. They need to score a 3 or higher on at least 5 exams, and their overall AP score average has to be 3.5 or higher.		

- Description: 146 characters
- Eligibility Requirements: 188 characters
- *Ask the audience if they feel this is a good example or if there is room for improvement. If it's a good example, why. If there is room for improvement, be specific.*
- **Room for Improvement:** We know how many AP exams have been completed based on that section of the application. It was great that the student shared that they self-studied for two of their exams, but they could have addressed why they chose to self-study. Other things they could have considered:
 - How much time was dedicated to self-studying?
 - Did they participate in study sessions with their peers? Did they have to travel long distance to these sessions?
 - How many AP courses are offered at their high school?
 - Does their school limit the number of AP courses a student can take per year?
 - Do they know how many students at their school that have earned this recognition?
- Also note:
 - These are guiding questions and students are not expected to hit every question due to limited word count
 - These questions are to be used to help guide a student to maximize their response and bring out key details/context

Example 2: Extracurricular activity

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
OverWatch Tournament Finalist Winner	9 th , 10 th , 11 th , 12 th Grade	22 hours per week, 52 weeks per year
Description		

Out of 100 gamers, I placed 1st overall in my local single-elimination E-Sports tournament winning a \$500 cash prize. The tournament requires a preliminary qualifier of over 300 players to play.

- Description: 194 characters
- **Room for Improvement:** Student quantified the information for the reader. Student could have put this activity as an award, but we may have missed out on the time commitment information that they shared. Student could have addressed how they prepared for the tournament.
 - Do you organize other gamers/teammates?
 - Quantify how often you organize others
 - Are you a leader amongst your teammates and do you have leadership responsibilities?
 - Do you create strategy? Do you lead during games? Do you coach to improve your team?

Example 3: Extracurricular activity

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Soccer (School & Club)	9 th , 10 th , 11 th , 12 th Grade	30 hours per week, 48 weeks per year
Description		
Playing soccer competitively since elementary school. Play for school and club outside of school. Captain of both teams for the last two years. Organize practices with coaches. Lead drills. Work with members of the team. Host team bonding events for new and veteran members.		

Character count: 274

- Student was concise, showed progression, leadership and commitment.
- Good example.
- Student did a great job of merging both the club and school soccer activities but they could've been reported separately which could have given the student more opportunities to bring out more detail and context
- Shared progression within the activity (e.g. How long? What level? Leadership? Responsibilities? Events)
- Quantify any of this that would be helpful

Example 4: Educational preparation program


Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Destination College Advising Corps	12 th Grade	1 hour per week, 32 weeks per year
Description		
DCAC works to increase the opportunities and resources provided to first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students who enter and complete college. They help students apply to colleges and financial aid, and also take us on college tours.		

Character count: 249

- Student described the program rather than how it specifically helped them.
- Good use of the acronym
 - Spelling it completely out in the name of the activity and shortening in the description
- Describing their involvement with the organization more personally rather than generally what the org does
 - Or the direct benefit that they got from working with the program
- Anything quantifiable would help
 - How many students they help, programs they run, the different applications they support, what grades the students are in?

Example 5: Educational preparation program

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Destination College Advising Corps	12 th Grade	1 hour per week, 32 weeks per year
Description		
<p>DCAC helps motivated high school students get a jump start on their college plans. It helped me know exactly what I had to do to get ready for college, helped me prepare for the application process, helped me find scholarships, understand what FAFSA is & how it could help me, and it taught me that I don't know everything, it's okay to ask for help.</p>		




Same example - improved description

Character count: 350

- This is a good example of a student explaining what they got out of the program and how it prepared them.
- Improved from previous case study example
- Still could use quantification but overall much improved

Examples 6: Other coursework

Course	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
UCLA Summer Session: Design & Media Arts	11 th Grade	32 hour per week, 2 weeks per year
Description		
The classes explored a variety of media examining different practices and design methods applied to the domains of print, net, worlds, and video. All work focused on a common theme and all four classes contributed to the creation of an integrated, multimedia exhibition at the end of the session. I learned typography, "Worldbuilding" as a for		



Character Count: 343

- It gives a good in-depth description of the course, but it could focus more on what the student learned or what they got out of the course.
- Student could also describe how this course connects with their proposed major or area of study.
- The final word was cut off so students should always proofread before submitting especially if they're copy & pasting from a Word document.

NOTE: if this were a true UCLA summer session course worth at least 4 quarter units, and if the student earned a letter grade in the course, then it should have been reported in the academic history section of the application rather than in the activities & award section.

Example 7: Volunteer/community service

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Second Harvest Food Bank	10 th , 11 th Grade	12 hours per week, 30 weeks per year
Description		
As a lead volunteer, I would delegate my peers to take bulk items, like rice and beans, and disperse them into smaller portions to prepare them for distribution which involves weighing and some math. On other occasions, I package and hand out food drives.		
Organization Description		
The food bank currently serves over 400,000 people a year throughout 7 counties. Second Harvest distributes over 12 million pounds of supplemental groceries to families and individuals suffering from food insecurity.		

Character Count: 255 (Description)

Character Count: 214 (Organization Description)

- Good example
- Demonstrates leadership “lead volunteer, delegated to peers” quantified contribution of organization in their description.
- We can always push for more quantification but at that point we are being nitpicky
 - There is room for it but example is good overall

Example 8: Employment

Where did you work?

[Redacted] Landscaping

When did you work?

9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Grade

Hours Per Week (include summer, if applicable)

~8 hours per week
~12 hour per week (summer)

What were your job responsibilities?

Helped my father mow lawns, trim flowers, set up dripping and sprinkler systems, check for problems with sprinklers and dripping, blow leaves, cut leaves/branches, rake leaves, and other general landscaping.

Describe the company or organization you worked for?

[Redacted] Landscaping Services has over 20 employees providing its services to surrounding cities.

Description: 208 characters

Employer Description:

Use of Earnings: Was not paid for the experience because the family owns business, and they were expected to contribute.

- Student shared exactly what their role within the company was.
- Since this experience is unpaid, it could go in the *volunteer/community service* section, but they are not penalized for putting it under the employment section.
 - There's an argument for both leaving it in employment or moving it to volunteer
 - Since the student is obligated to do this work
 - It's up to the student on how they want to categorize it
- Quantification would help this description
- Was this compensated or not? Was it for fun? What's their why?
- What's the impact on the family? Does this work support the family in a meaningful way?
- How were these hours distributed?
 - Are they doing a little every day or sacrificing their weekends/mornings/afternoons to do this work?

Example 9: Employment

Job Title	When did you work?	Hours Per Week (include summer, if applicable)
Business Owner (Shopify)	9 th , 10 th , 11 th , 12 th Grade	~ 30 hours per week including summer
What were your job responsibilities?		
I started a business selling custom clay earrings during the pandemic using Shopify. I sell market and manage all of my product to customers from all over the world. This business has supported me and my family.		
Describe the company or organization you worked for?		

Use of Earnings: Provide earnings to household bills and other necessities.

- Student could add information on how they sold, marketed, and managed inventory and/or the process of creating custom earrings (perhaps that information was found in the personal insight question on creativity).
- We need to add the description of the company/organization.
 - Example of employer description: [Redacted] Earrings is the e-commerce business started on the platform, Shopify. This e-commerce business allows me to be self-employed and the sole proprietor of the business. [Redacted] Earrings produces over \$2000 a month in sales from home.
- Quantify when possible
- When a student is self employed helping them understand what their company's mission is or could be
 - How the business came to be
 - What is the business's main objective?
- What is the business's impact? Does the business has quantifiable results?



Last insights and tips



As you are counseling students these are common missed opportunities to keep in mind and to make students aware of (in no particular order):

- Leaving This Section Blank : It is a huge missed opportunity to leave the section blank, but it is very common and simply leaves us with the desire to know more. Between 9th-12th Grade there has to be something a student can talk about and if there truly is nothing, have them address it in the Additional Comments Section. Sometimes students will also leave the section blank because they talk about the activity within their personal insight question responses. We encourage students to add their activities to the appropriate sections then elaborate within their personal insight questions.
- Assuming the activity is known to all: Students commonly believe that we know activities that are unique to their high school or community. Unless it is a national program, students should spell out the name and add a quick description. No acronyms allowed!
- No Clarity: Students don't provide a clear definition of their role and responsibilities. A little background on what the activity is can be helpful, but we still need to know what THEY did.
- Unaware of the importance of the section: Students may not be clear about the role that this section plays in the admissions process. It's important for them to know what the comprehensive review is and why this section is so important to the process.
- Talk more about the activity than themselves: We learn nothing about students and their commitment when they talk only about the program. It turns into a list with little value if we can't personally connect the student to the activity described.

Common myths & misconceptions

- **Twenty (20) entries are mandatory.**
 - We do not have a set number of activities that are required. We will look for commitment, progression, and leadership. Quantity is not valued more than quality.
- **Each entry must be 350 characters long.**
 - Being clear and concise is an important part of this section. We aren't necessarily looking for complete sentences.



- What makes sense to us as professionals does not always have the same effect on students in processing this section. This can be a huge missed opportunity if students don't understand what we are looking for as they navigate this section. These are some common myths and misconceptions that students regularly make that cause this section to be less effective in the comprehensive review process.
- When reviewing this section, we value quality over quantity.
- The length of what is written is less valuable than the content and learning about a student's involvement.

Common myths & misconceptions

- **Readers only want to see school activities.**
 - Students should consider school, community, county, state, national, and international involvements.
- **The {insert category} section is the most important.**
 - No specific category in the activities and awards section is more important than the others.
- **They don't read it anyway!**
 - This section of the application is one of two ways to get to know the student outside of the classroom. They should consider the activities and awards section their unofficial resume.

- Of course, we want to know what a student does in school, but they should also look beyond in-school involvement. What a student does outside of the class, no matter where it is, adds context and value to the overall application.
- Students want to know what kinds of activities look best but remember that we are just asking them to be themselves! It's important for students to remember that we rarely ask questions in the UC Application that we don't want to know the answer to – we want to get to know them!
- Please remind your students that it is OK if they don't have something to enter for every category.

Last-minute reminders

- UC values academic *and* non-academic achievements
- **Commitment, Leadership, Progression**
- **Context** and **clarity** are important
- Encourage students to think beyond school-based activities and awards



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- Thank you all so much for joining our session.
- To wrap up, please remember that every UC campus conducts a comprehensive review. This means that we not only value a student's academic achievements, but their achievements and involvements outside of the classroom as well.
- You've heard this a lot already, but context and clarity are crucial! Students should help the reader understand their role and responsibilities in the activity.
- When we review applications, all activities have the potential to add value and all activities should be included, but we do value leadership, commitment and progression. Students can demonstrate this in many ways, as activities come in many forms.
- Encourage your students to think beyond what they are doing at school and think about what their responsibilities are at home and in their community. As always, we are so grateful for the work that you do and the information you are able to bring to your students!

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—
THANK YOU