



# The Impacts of School- Provided GPA and Advanced Course Limits on Admissions Decisions

At Midsize and Large Universities

# District Leadership Forum

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# Table of Contents

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<b>1) Executive Overview .....</b>	<b>4</b>
Key Observations .....	4
<b>2) Admissions Processes .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Overview .....	5
<b>3) School-Provided GPA.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Providing Unweighted GPAs .....	7
Merit-Based Financial Aid and Scholarships .....	10
A-plus Grades .....	11
<b>4) College-Level Coursework .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Advanced Course Limits .....	12
Advanced Course Preferences .....	14
<b>5) Communicating Policy Changes.....</b>	<b>17</b>
School Profiles and Secondary School Reports.....	17
Direct Communication.....	19
<b>6) Research Methodology .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Project Challenge .....	20
Project Sources .....	20
Research Parameters .....	21
<b>7) Networking Contacts.....</b>	<b>22</b>

# 1) Executive Overview

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## Key Observations

**Profiled institutions use three distinct processes to make admissions decisions: comprehensive, class-rank-based, and standardized.** At **James Madison University** (comprehensive), admissions officers evaluate applicants' academic performance in the context of their school through two separate analyses: rigor of course load and grades earned. At **Clemson University** (class-rank-based), admissions officers use school-provided weighted GPA and class rank to array applicants by performance within their school. Admissions officers then admit a variable percentage of top-performing applicants from each school. At the **University of Georgia** (standardized), admissions staff calculate new GPAs for applicants that add standardized weights for AP and IB courses. Admissions officers may use this GPA to compare applicants across schools.

**Schools that enforce advanced course limits likely do not disadvantage applicants in admissions processes.** At all profiled institutions, admissions officers assess the rigor of applicants' course loads in the context of their high school. Contacts suggest that admissions officers adjust rigor ratings to account for advanced course limits. At profiled institutions that re-calculate weighted GPAs, applicants from schools that impose limits can achieve lower maximum GPAs than applicants from schools without limits. However, contacts at the **University of Georgia** note that this small disparity in GPA should not affect whether the institution admits an applicant. Further, contacts at the University of Georgia and **Institution A** note that admissions officers adjust their assessments of applicants to account for school context when reviewing applicants from schools with limits.

**Schools that do not provide weighted GPAs may disadvantage students at institutions with a class-rank-based admissions process.** Contacts at **Clemson University** report that when a school does not provide weighted GPA or class rank, admissions officers cannot easily distinguish high-performing students from low-performing students. Because admissions officers cannot determine which applicants perform well academically, high-performing students may experience a disadvantage in the admissions process. Contacts also note that if a school does not provide weighted GPA or class rank officers cannot determine the quality of applicants from the school, so they may not admit borderline applicants from that school.

**Admissions officers at most profiled institutions do not consider A-plus grades as different than A grades.** At institutions that recalculate student GPAs, admissions staff do not weight A-plus grades differently than A-minus grades. Also, at most profiled institutions, contacts report that admissions officers do not acknowledge differences among A-plus, A, and A-minus grades. Of profiled institutions, only contacts at **Clemson University** note that officers factor A-plus and A-minus grades into admissions decisions consistently. When admissions officers at Clemson University attempt to determine class rank of applicants from schools that do not provide weighted GPA/class rank, they weight A-plus, A, and A-minus grades differently.

**Clearly indicate changes to grading and course policies in the school profile/secondary school report.** Contacts at most institutions recommend that school counselors communicate all policy changes to admissions officers in school profiles and/or secondary school reports. Contacts suggest that school counselors indicate when schools enacted policy changes, clearly describe how the school will implement policy changes and reflect them on student transcripts, clarify how policy changes will affect student GPAs and course selection, and identify if school counselors grant exceptions to the policy.

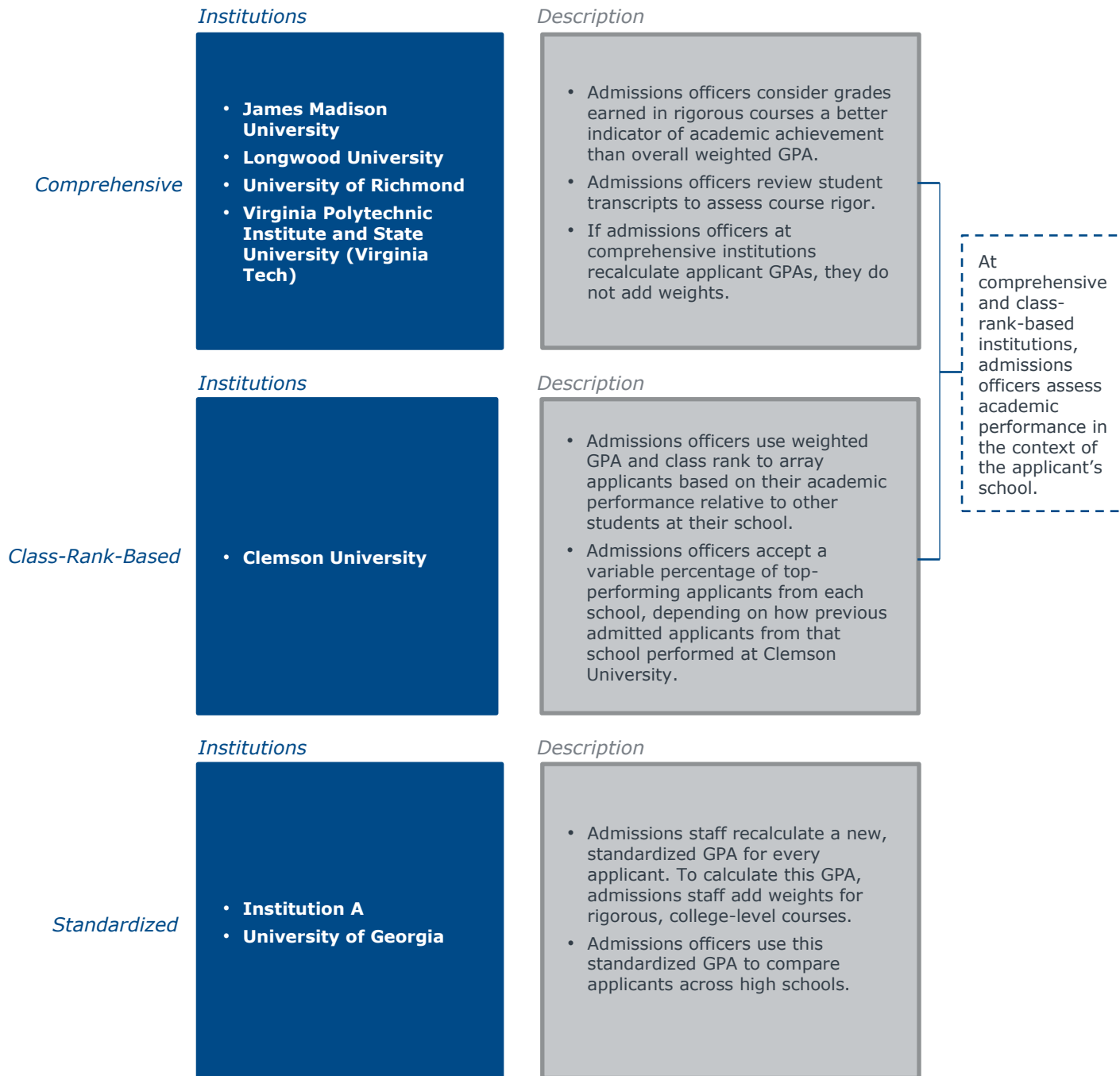
## 2) Admissions Processes

### Overview

### Profiled Institutions Use Three Distinct Processes to Evaluate Applicants

All profiled institutions assess applicants' academic achievement based on the rigor of the courses they complete (course rigor) and their grades in those courses (academic performance). For the purposes of this report, admissions processes at profiled institutions are organized into three categories: comprehensive, class-rank-based, and standardized.

### Admissions Processes at Profiled Institutions



For more information on **Institution A's** holistic review process, see **page 8** of the report.



### ***Institution A Uses a Two-Step Admissions Process That Includes a Review of Standardized, Recalculated GPAs and a Holistic Review of Applications***

Admissions staff at **Institution A** recalculate GPAs for every applicant. To recalculate GPAs, staff add standardized weights to grades earned in rigorous courses. Staff establish a recalculated GPA and test score threshold. The institution admits all applicants who exceed this threshold. Admissions officers then holistically review applicants who do not meet the threshold but may still qualify for admission. This holistic review process incorporates class rank and other student and school characteristics beyond recalculated GPA and test scores. Contacts report that the percentage of applications that undergo holistic review varies by year but suggest that admissions officers review applications in the middle 50 percent of the applicant pool. Admissions officers also holistically review applicants for admissions into the honors college and some scholarships.

## 3) School-Provided GPA

### Providing Unweighted GPAs

For more information on how comprehensive institutions assess course rigor, see **page 12** of the report.

### Providing Unweighted GPAs Does Not Disadvantage Applicants to Institutions That Recalculate GPAs

Admissions staff at **James Madison University**, the **University of Georgia**, the **University of Richmond**, and **Institution A** recalculate applicants' GPAs to assess their academic performance. All profiled institutions include only core courses in recalculated GPAs. James Madison University and the University of Richmond do not incorporate course rigor into evaluations of academic performance but instead analyze course rigor separately. Thus, admissions officers at James Madison University and University of Richmond do not apply weights to recalculated GPAs. Conversely, transcript processing staff at Institution A and the University of Georgia incorporate assessments of course rigor into recalculated GPAs through standardized weights.

### GPA Recalculation Process at Institutions with Standardized Admissions Processes<sup>1</sup>

1

#### Isolate Core Courses

Transcript processing staff only include core courses in normalized, recalculated student GPAs. At the **University of Georgia**, these courses include English, Math, Science, Social Science, and Foreign Language. At **Institution A**, these courses include 19 credits required by the state's commission of higher education.

Transcript processing staff at **Institution A** select whichever courses most benefit the applicant. For example, if an applicant earned an A in a standard math course and a C in an advanced math course, processing staff include the standard course in the recalculation.

2

#### Add Weight for Advanced Courses


Transcript processing staff add additional quality points for advanced, college-level coursework. Processing staff at the **University of Georgia** add one additional quality point for Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses (i.e., a B in a standard course receives 3 quality points, while an B in an AP course receives 4 quality points). Contacts report that Institution A is adjusting their weighting system, but processing staff currently assign equivalent weights for AP, IB, and dual credit courses, and a smaller weight for honors courses.

Processing staff at the **University of Georgia** add one additional quality point for school strength. If previous students from the applicant's school performed well at the institution, grades in all courses, regardless of level, receive this bonus.

At **Institution A**, contacts request that school staff do not apply weights to letter grades (e.g., report a B in an AP course as an A on the transcript). This method of applying weights interferes with the GPA recalculation process at the institution.

<sup>1</sup> "Discussion on Admission Criteria Components," University of Georgia, accessed March 10, 2019. <https://www.admissions.uga.edu/prospective-students/first-year/admissions-criteria>; David Graves, "Calculating a UGA GPA," *Undergraduate Admissions Q & A (blog)*, University of Georgia, November 18, 2013, <http://ugaadmissions.blogspot.com/2013/11/calculating-uga-gpa.html>.

Contacts at Institution A, James Madison University, and the University of Georgia report that admissions officers do not consider weighted GPAs provided by schools. At the University of Richmond, contacts note that admissions officers may use school-provided weighted GPAs to compare applicants from that school but never to compare applicants across schools. Contacts at all four institutions state that schools that provide unweighted GPAs do not disadvantage applicants.



### Contacts Do Not Express Preference for a Particular GPA Weighting System

Contacts at all profiled institutions report that they do not encourage schools that weight GPA to use any specific system. Contacts report that school counselors should use whatever system to weight GPA that best serves their students and stakeholders.

During the holistic review process at Institution A, admissions officers consider class rank an important indicator of student academic performance. Contacts report that many schools use weighted GPAs to establish class rank. However, contacts note that when schools provide an unweighted GPA or class rank, admissions officers use Institution A's recalculated GPA to rank applicants from the same school. Because the admissions office uses recalculated GPAs, contacts report that schools that provide unweighted GPA or class rank do not disadvantage applicants in the holistic review process.

## Providing Unweighted GPA Does Not Disadvantage Applicants to Institutions Where Admissions Officers Review Student Transcripts Holistically

Contacts at **Longwood University** note that admissions officers typically do not recalculate student GPAs.

Admissions officers at **Longwood University** and **Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)** evaluate academic achievement and course rigor separately. Rather than recalculate applicants' GPAs, admissions officers at these institutions review student transcripts to assess applicants' performance in each of their courses. Further, officers evaluate each applicant in the context of their school. Because holistic application reviews consider applicants' contexts, contacts at both institutions report that schools that provide unweighted GPA or class rank do not disadvantage applicants in admissions processes.

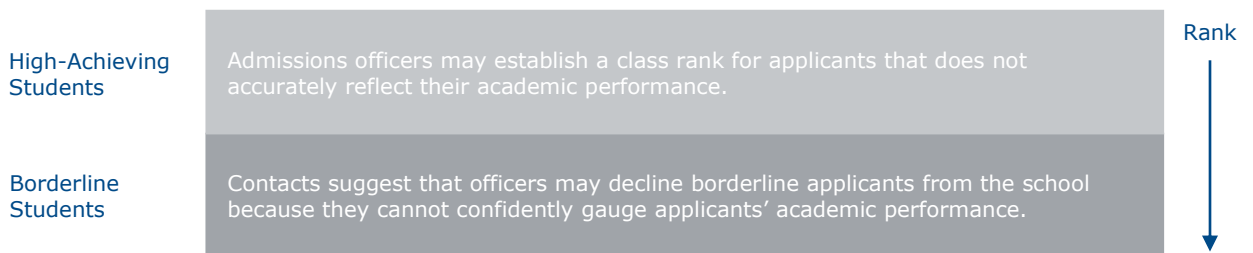
At Virginia Tech, contacts report that because admissions officers assess grades earned in each course, they do not consider overall GPAs provided by schools during the admissions process. At Longwood University, contacts note that admissions officers may use school-provided weighted GPAs to compare applicants from the same school but never to compare applicants across schools.



## Providing Unweighted GPA May Disadvantage Applicants to Institutions That Prioritize GPA as an Indicator of Student Success

Contacts report that admissions officers at **Clemson University** prefer that schools provide class rank based on weighted GPA, because this rank incorporates course rigor. When schools do not provide a class rank or weighted GPA, admissions officers attempt to develop a class rank for each applicant based on a raw GPA calculation, the number of advanced courses taken, and how previously admitted applicants from that school performed at Clemson University. Contacts report that when schools provide unweighted GPA, admissions officers may establish inaccurate class ranks for applicants, which may disadvantage high-achieving and borderline applicants in the admissions process.

### Disadvantages to High-Achieving and Borderline Applicants from Schools That Provide Unweighted GPA to *Clemson University*



For schools that provide unweighted GPA and consistently send students to Clemson University (e.g., large schools in South Carolina), admissions officers can develop a system to rank applicants based on how previous students from the school perform at Clemson University. Contacts report that this ranking system mitigates disadvantages to applicants from these schools. If a school does not consistently send students to Clemson University, admissions officers cannot develop this ranking system for applicants from that school. Therefore, high-performing schools that provide unweighted GPA and consistently send students to Clemson University impose less of a disadvantage on applicants in the admissions process, as admissions officers can use historical performance data to develop an effective class rank for applicants.

However, if a school eliminate weighted GPA and begins to provide unweighted GPA, contacts at **Clemson University** note that the admissions office requires between one and three years of student performance data to develop a system to rank applicants from that school. Contacts note that before they can establish ranks for applicants, admissions officers may not admit borderline applicants, especially from low-performing schools.

## Merit-Based Financial Aid and Scholarships

### Most Profiled Institutions Do Not Rely on School-Provided GPA to Determine Scholarship Recipients

At **Institution A**, **University of Richmond**, and **Longwood University**, contacts report that schools that provide unweighted GPA do not disadvantage applicants in scholarship allocation processes. Contacts at **James Madison University**, the **University of Georgia**, and **Virginia Tech** report unfamiliarity with scholarship processes at their institution because offices separate from the admissions office allocate scholarships. However, contacts at these institutions believe that schools that provide unweighted GPA do not disadvantage students in scholarship allocation processes. At these institutions, scholarship offices do not use school-provided GPA to compare applicants across schools to determine scholarship recipients but instead use three distinct approaches. Only contacts at **Clemson University** report that schools that provide unweighted GPAs disadvantage applicants in scholarship allocation processes.

### Scholarship Allocation Processes at Profiled Institutions

If schools do not provide a class rank or weighted GPA, staff at **Institution A** default to the admission office's recalculated, standardized GPA to assess scholarship candidates. Thus, contacts report that applicants from these schools do not experience a disadvantage in the scholarship allocation process.

#### Use Recalculated GPA

At **James Madison University**, the **University of Georgia**, and **Institution A** contacts believe that scholarship offices use unweighted (i.e., James Madison) or weighted (i.e., University of Georgia, Institution A) GPAs that the admissions office calculates to assess scholarship candidates. Contacts at James Madison University note that external scholarships (e.g., Rotary Club) may require weighted GPA, and contacts at Institution A report that applications for some institutional scholarships undergo holistic review.

#### Do Not Consider GPA

Contacts at the **University of Richmond** and **Virginia Tech** report that scholarship offices do not consider GPA to determine scholarship recipients. At the University of Richmond, the scholarship office bases their decisions on applicants' contributions to their high school communities. All applicants considered for scholarships demonstrate high levels of achievement in their courses, so staff review applications to identify other factors that differentiate applicants (e.g., essays, extra-curricular activities). At Virginia Tech, scholarship staff review student transcripts and assess grades earned in each of their courses to determine scholarship recipients.

#### Do Not Compare Across Schools

At **Longwood University**, contacts assert that admissions staff do not award scholarships competitively (i.e., by comparing students across schools or within schools). Rather, staff use a combination of GPA and test scores to determine if a student meets scholarship criteria based on the opportunities available to them at their school. Contacts state that schools that provide unweighted GPA do not disadvantage applicants in this scholarship process.



### **Because Scholarship Decisions Depend on Class Rank at *Clemson University*, Schools that Provide Unweighted GPA Disadvantage Applicants**

Contacts at **Clemson University** report that scholarship offices use the same class-rank-based system as the admissions office to determine recipients of merit-based scholarships and financial support. If a school does not provide a weighted GPA or rigor-based class rank, scholarship staff may not award scholarships to applicants from that school because they cannot determine the highest-performing applicants.

## A-plus Grades

### **Admissions Officers at Most Profiled Institutions Do Not Consider A-plus Grades as Different than A Grades**

At institutions that recalculate GPA, admissions staff do not weight A-plus grades differently than A-minus grades. Of profiled institutions, only contacts at **Clemson University** note that admissions officers consider A-plus grades and A-minus grades differently during assessments of applicants' academic performance. When admissions officers at Clemson University attempt to rank applicants from schools that do not provide weighted GPA or class rank, they weight A-plus, A, and A-minus grades differently.

Contacts at the **University of Richmond** note that admissions officers may highlight that students earned multiple A-pluses in admissions discussions but emphasize that schools that do not offer A-plus grades do not disadvantage applicants.

## 4) College-Level Coursework

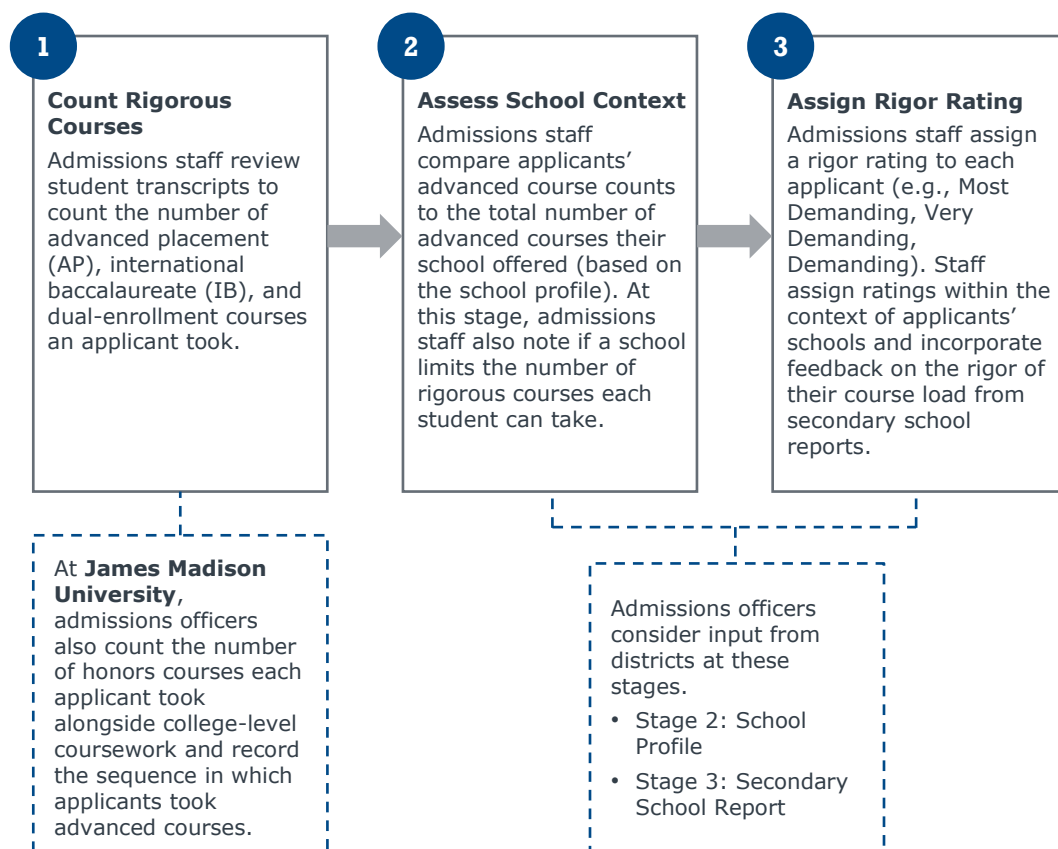
### Advanced Course Limits

### Course Limits Do Not Disadvantage Applicants to Institutions that Assess Course Rigor in Schools' Context

At **James Madison University**, **Longwood University**, the **University of Richmond**, and **Virginia Tech**, admissions officers assess course rigor separately from academic achievement. Officers at these institutions assess course rigor within the context of applicants' high schools (i.e., based on the advanced coursework their school offered). Admissions officers at the University of Richmond and Virginia Tech rely on information conveyed in the school profile to identify the courses available at each school.

At James Madison University and the University of Richmond, admissions officers use additive processes to determine the rigor of each applicant's course load.

### Additive Course Rigor Calculation Process at the *University of Richmond*



Contacts at all comprehensive institutions note that they evaluate course rigor on a school-by-school basis, not across all schools. At Longwood University, James Madison University, and Virginia Tech, contacts report that advanced course limits do not disadvantage students. At the University of Richmond, contacts suggest that schools set a limit of no more than four advanced courses in junior and senior year, so students can engage with extra-curricular activities, hobbies, and other activities.

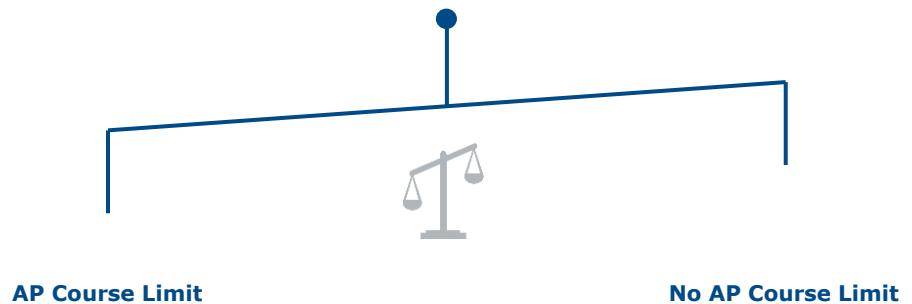
At **Clemson University**, admissions officers also evaluate applicants in the context of their school. Contacts at Clemson University report that if a school limits the number of rigorous courses students can take, the highest-performing students at that school will still take the maximum number of courses allowed and succeed in those courses. If the school provides an effective class rank/weighted GPA, the highest-performing applicants receive the highest rankings. Thus, schools that limit advanced courses do not disadvantage applicants to Clemson University.

## In Rare Cases, Course Limits May Disadvantage Applicants to Institutions that Recalculate GPA

If an admissions officer at the **University of Georgia** identifies an advanced course limit, they place a note on the application so that subsequent reviewers consider the limit during their read.

At **Institution A** and the **University of Georgia**, contacts note that if schools limit the number of advanced courses students can take, they decrease the maximum recalculated GPA that applicants can earn. However, while contacts at the University of Georgia acknowledge that the admission office's GPA recalculation does not account for limits on advanced courses, they report that the difference in GPA between students from schools who limit advanced courses and schools that do not is not large enough to affect admissions decisions. Contacts report that if schools inform admissions officers of limits, the limits should not disadvantage applicants in the admissions process.

### Maximum GPA Disparity at the *University of Georgia*



#### Input

Students take eight courses per year. This applicant took one AP course freshman year, two sophomore year, three junior year, and four senior year. All other courses were standard courses. The applicant earned A's in all courses.

#### Admissions Staff Recalculate GPA

- 36 A grades x 4.0 QP/A = 144 QP (quality points)
- 10 AP courses x 1.0 QP = 10 QP
- Admissions staff divide total QP by number of courses to determine GPA.

#### Final Recalculated Senior GPA

**4.28**

#### Input

Students take eight courses per year. This applicant took four AP courses in freshman and sophomore year and six AP courses in junior and senior year. All other courses were standard courses. The applicant earns A's in all courses.

#### Admissions Staff Recalculate GPA

- 36 A grades x 4.0 QP/A = 144 QP
- 20 AP courses x 1.0 QP = 20 QP
- Admissions staff divide total QP by number of courses to determine GPA.

#### Final Recalculated Senior GPA

**4.56**

At Institution A, contacts note that applicants from schools with advanced course limits may experience a disadvantage in the first, threshold-based round of admissions, because they are more likely to fall below the threshold for automatic admission. Contacts report that admissions officers should account for school context in the second round of admissions (i.e., the holistic application review process) and admit applicants who miss the threshold due to course limits, which would mitigate this disadvantage. When the two-part admission process works as designed, applicants do not experience a disadvantage in the admission process. However, contacts acknowledge that admissions officers may fail to recognize advanced course limits during the holistic application review process, which could disadvantage students in rare cases.



### **Advanced Course Limitations May Negatively Impact Student Time-To-Degree at Post-Secondary Institutions**

Contacts at **Institution A** note that advanced course limits inhibit students from accruing credit before matriculating to a post-secondary institution, which can prevent early graduation for some students and delay time-to-degree for others.

## Advanced Course Preferences

### **Some Profiled Institutions Consider AP and IB Courses More Rigorous than Dual-Enrollment Courses**

Contacts at **Institution A**, **James Madison University**, **Longwood University**, **University of Richmond**, and **Virginia Tech** consider Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual-enrollment courses equal in rigor unless a school's profile indicates otherwise. Nonetheless, contacts recommend that students pursue some programs and courses. At **Clemson University**, contacts report that admissions officers consider AP/IB courses more rigorous than dual-enrollment courses, as the rigor of dual-enrollment courses varies more by region and by school than the rigor of AP and IB courses.

## Recommendations for Student Course Load



### Encourage Students Who Take IB Courses to Pursue the Full IB Diploma

At **James Madison University**, contacts report that admissions officers rate students who complete the IB diploma program at a slightly higher rigor than students who take standalone AP, IB, or dual-enrollment courses, because diploma candidates must complete additional assignments outside class.



### To Maximize College Credit, Encourage Students to Pursue AP Coursework

At the **University of Richmond**, contacts note that faculty value AP courses more than dual-enrollment courses when assigning college credit to incoming students.



### Encourage Students to Take Rigorous Courses Offered at their High School When Possible

Admissions officers at **Virginia Tech** prefer students take AP or IB courses offered at high school campuses, rather than dual-enrollment courses offered at a college campus. Contacts explain that students who remain at their high school contribute more to the school community and do not incur additional costs from community colleges.



### To Improve Applicants' Chance of Admission, Encourage Students to Pursue AP or IB Coursework

Contacts at **Clemson University** report that because the rigor of dual-enrollment courses varies more than the rigor of other advanced courses across regions, admissions officers consider dual-enrollment courses less rigorous than other advanced courses. Similarly, though admissions officers at the **University of Georgia** do not prefer AP and IB courses when they review transcripts, the admissions office does not add weights for dual-enrollment courses when they recalculate GPA. Contacts note that officers could decline students who take dual-enrollment courses due to this GPA disparity.

## No Profiled Institutions Recommend an Optimal Number of College-Level Courses

Contacts at **Clemson University**, **James Madison University**, the **University of Georgia**, and **Virginia Tech** suggest that students pursue the most rigorous courses available to them while maintaining good grades. Contacts at Virginia Tech encourage students to take upper-level classes that align with their strengths and desired major; if a student enjoys English, performs well in the subject, and wants to be a writer, that student should take AP English. At the **University of Richmond**, contacts emphasize that the admissions office does not establish a minimum number of advanced courses students must take to gain admission to the institution.

Contacts at Clemson University and the University of Richmond note that admissions officers do not reward applicants for taking additional AP courses beyond an established number. At Clemson University, contacts cite research from the College Board that indicates that the post-college success of students who take numerous AP courses and students who take between five and six AP courses does not differ.



## Encourage Students to Submit AP/IB Test Scores if They Perform Well

At the **University of Richmond** and **Longwood University**, contacts report that admissions officers consider high scores on AP/IB tests during admissions processes. However, contacts at the University of Richmond note that because the admissions office receives only self-reported scores by the admissions deadline, officers do not consider AP/IB test scores as an important factor in admissions decisions. Contacts at all other profiled institutions note that admissions offices do not consider AP/IB test scores in the admissions process.

## To Avoid Disadvantaging Students, Do Not Allow Exceptions to AP Course Limits

Contacts at the **University of Richmond** and **Virginia Tech** note that when schools limit the number of advanced courses students can take, parents and students often apply for exceptions to the rule. At Virginia Tech, contacts note that when a school allows students to apply for exceptions, students that obey the policy may experience disadvantages in admissions processes because other applicants from the school pursued a more rigorous course load. Contacts at Virginia Tech recommend that school administrators do not grant exceptions to course limits unless necessary (e.g., if a student needs to retake a course due to sustained absence). In exceptional cases, contacts request that school counselors clearly explain the reasoning behind the exception to admissions officers.



## 5) Communicating Policy Changes

### School Profiles and Secondary School Reports

#### Clearly Indicate Changes to Grading and Course Policies in the School Profile

At **Clemson University** and the **University of Richmond**, contacts encourage schools to provide as much information as possible about course offerings, grading scales, and policies to admissions offices to ensure that admissions officers can make informed admissions decisions. At Clemson University and **James Madison University**, contacts also recommend that school profiles contain information about what makes AP, IB, and dual-enrollment courses more advanced than honors and standard courses. For example, contacts at James Madison University prefer it when schools indicate if they instruct dual-enrollment courses at the high school or at a community college so that admissions officers can assess the context of the coursework.

#### Indicate Changes to Policies on Student Transcripts

Contacts at **James Madison University** note that admissions officers do not always consult the school profile when they review applications. Contacts recommend schools clearly report policy changes on every applicant's transcript (e.g., in blank space on the right side of the transcript) to ensure counselors consider the limit during their assessment of course rigor.

#### Example Characteristics of Effective School Profiles



Contacts at **Institution A** prefer it when schools provide a class rank for holistic review purposes but note that schools can use techniques other than weighted GPA to determine class rank (e.g., GPA distributions).

At the **University of Richmond**, contacts recommend that school profiles provide information about the school environment and policies, including school community descriptors and demographics, honors and awards for the school, and graduation requirements.

#### Clarify Grade Scales

Identify the base grade scale, indicate which courses receive which weights (if any), describe how counselors calculate GPA, and display the maximum possible GPA.

#### Identify Course Offerings and Limits

List all advanced courses offered at the school, the time at which the school offers them, and the maximum number of courses and advanced courses a student can take.

#### Convey Class Rank Determinants

Describe the process to determine class rank, if applicable.

#### Contextualize Student Performance

Provide GPA and grade distribution information (e.g., what percentage of students fall within a certain GPA range, what percentage of students earn A grades versus B grades).

#### Contextualize Student Course Loads

Identify the percentage of students who pursue advanced coursework and the extent to which they do (e.g., percentage of students who take one or more AP courses).

#### Explain Course Rigor

Describe which courses are most rigorous and explain what makes advanced courses more rigorous than standard courses (e.g., different curriculum).

Contacts at Clemson University, **James Madison University**, **Longwood University**, the University of Richmond, and **Virginia Tech** emphasize that schools must report all policy changes that affect student grades and course selection in the school profile.

## Strategies to Communicate Changes to GPA Calculations and Advanced Course Limits in School Profiles



### Eliminating Weighted GPAs

- Clearly communicate the policy onboarding process to admissions offices. For students currently in high school, does the school adjust student GPA and course weights on transcripts for the years before the change, or do admissions offices need to recalculate applicants' GPA for those years?
- Clearly indicate when the school enacted the policy and when it becomes effective.
- Describe how the school calculates GPA for this application cycle and describe the school's GPA weighting system prior to the new policy.

### Advanced Course Limits

- Indicate any limits to advanced courses and the degree to which the school applies them (e.g., juniors limited to three AP courses in the year, and seniors limited to five AP course in the year).
- Clearly indicate when the school enacted the policy and when it becomes effective.
- Clearly indicate if the school grants exceptions to the limit.

Contacts at the **University of Georgia** suggest that all schools clearly indicate course limits in secondary school reports.

### Use Secondary School Reports to Communicate the Rigor of Each Applicant's Course Load

Contacts at the **University of Georgia** and the **University of Richmond** note that counselors can use an applicant's secondary school report to communicate the rigor of their course load relative to other students at the school. At the **University of Georgia**, contacts also note that counselors can use the secondary school report to identify the rigor of specific courses; counselors can indicate the rigor of courses applicants took (e.g., AP US History) in relation to other similar courses offered at the school (e.g., Honors US History).

## Direct Communication

### Reach Out to Admissions Officers to Discuss Changes to Grading and Course Limit Policies

Contacts at **James Madison University**, **Longwood University**, and **Virginia Tech** recommend that school officials reach out to admissions officers directly whenever the school changes its policies. Contacts recommend that counselors call or email all admissions contacts and regional admissions officers to notify them of any changes and discuss potential implications before the start of reading season (i.e., late October/early November). To identify admissions representatives, contacts at Virginia Tech suggest that school counselors consult visit logs and email all officers who visited the school. Further, contacts encourage counselors to meet with all college admissions contacts when they visit the high school to discuss any policy changes in person.

## 6) Research Methodology

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### Project Challenge

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What role do GPAs have on admissions decisions at contact institutions?
- How do contact institutions consider varying methods that districts use to weight GPAs for admissions decisions?
- Do contact institutions recommend districts weight GPAs?
- Do districts that do not weight GPAs negatively impact students' chances of admission at contact institutions?
- Do contact institutions recalculate transcripts for districts that use weighted GPAs? If so, how?
- Do districts that do not weight GPAs negatively impact students' merit-based financial aid/scholarship opportunities at contact institutions?
  - How do scholarship decision makers at contact institutions take into consideration GPAs above a 4.0?
- What recommendations do contact institutions have for districts considering eliminating GPA weight?
- What role do AP/Dual Enrollment courses have on admissions decisions at contact institutions?
- Do contact institutions view AP and Dual Enrollment equally? If not, please explain.
- Do contact institutions recommend an optimal number of AP courses students should take?
- How do contact institutions take into consideration districts that limit the number of AP courses that students can take when reviewing applications?
- Do districts that limit AP course enrollment negatively impact students' chances of admission at contact institutions?
- What recommendations do contact institutions have for school districts considering limiting the number of AP courses students can take?

### Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries ([eab.com](http://eab.com))
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<http://nces.ed.gov/>)
- University of Georgia Undergraduate Admissions website:
  - Graves, David. "Calculating a UGA GPA," *Undergraduate Admissions Q & A (blog)*. University of Georgia. November 18, 2013. <http://ugaadmissions.blogspot.com/2013/11/calculating-uga-gpa.html>
  - University of Georgia. "Discussion on Admission Criteria Components." Accessed March 10, 2019. <https://www.admissions.uga.edu/prospective-students/first-year/admissions-criteria>.

## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed admissions staff at midsize and large higher education institutions on the East Coast. Contacts at one profiled institution (i.e., **Institution A**) requested anonymity.

### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

<b>Institution Name</b>	<b>State / Region</b>	<b>Approximate Enrollment (Total/Undergraduate)</b>
<b>Clemson University</b>	South Carolina	24,500/19,500
<b>James Madison University</b>	Virginia	22,000/20,000
<b>Longwood University</b>	Virginia	5,000/4,500
<b>University of Georgia</b>	Georgia	37,500/29,000
<b>University of Richmond</b>	Virginia	4,000/3,000
<b>Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University</b>	Virginia	34,500/27,000
<b>Institution A</b>	South	34,500/26,500

## 7) Networking Contacts

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### **Clemson University**

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### **James Madison University**

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### **University of Georgia**

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