



GETTING A **JUMP START** **ON COLLEGE**

There are hundreds of options for motivated high school students interested in a pre-college experience, from animal science programs at Cornell University to digital filmmaking at the University of California Los Angeles. The structure of pre-college programs is nearly as varied as the areas of study they cover: Some are credit-bearing, while others are not. Some are one or two weeks, while others last for a month or more. Many are held on campus, but a smattering of programs are conducted online.

No matter the focus or format, pre-college programs are gaining in popularity. “We are seeing a growing trend among both universities to host pre-college programs and students to enroll in them,” says Michael Steidel, Dean of Admissions at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. “They provide an opportunity to challenge kids while they are in secondary school to think more broadly about the possibilities once they come to college.”

Carnegie Mellon has offered pre-college programs for approximately 50 years, beginning with an advanced placement/early admission program and a fine arts program. Today, the university offers those programs plus several more, including a National High School Game Academy, a music program, a drama program and others. Between 400 and 500 students descend upon the Pittsburgh campus each summer for pre-college offerings, which typically run for six weeks.

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BENEFITS OF PRE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

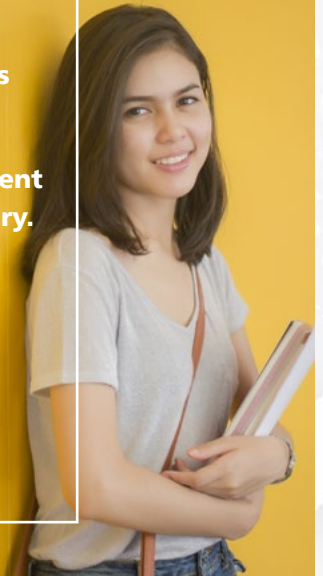
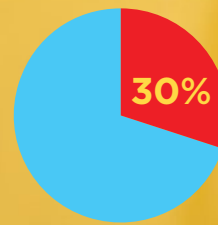
“The big advantage for students is being on a college campus taking classes from college faculty who are really setting the pace and helping kids understand what it’s like to attend a university,” says Steidel.

Emory University in Atlanta also uses pre-college programs to help high school students get a feel for college—even before they set foot on campus. “Our goal is to offer students a mini-college experience, so that starts with the application process which mirrors the regular Emory college application process,” says Sara Wade, Associate Director of Summer School and Pre-College Programs at Emory. “It’s an online application that requires students to submit a letter of recommendation, test scores and things like that.”

Approximately 400 students enroll in Emory’s pre-college programs and take two-week, non-credit courses in more than 20 subjects, ranging from creative writing to medical microbiology. Students spend the morning in class, then participate in “College 101” sessions most afternoons. The sessions, which help students prepare for the college admission process, cover topics such as writing a college essay, navigating financial aid and choosing a major.

Another benefit of pre-college programs is that they allow students to get an extended view of the university compared to traditional one-day campus visits. “Once students come here, Emory is on their radar and is often a

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top institution to which they will apply,” says Mollie Korski, Director of Summer School and Pre-College Programs. Approximately 60 to 70 percent of program participants ultimately apply to Emory, and of that group about 30 percent get accepted to Emory.

Pre-college programs also introduce students to areas of study to see whether they like them or not. This is particularly important for Carnegie Mellon because students must apply to one of seven colleges and schools within the university. “We don’t have a school of general studies where kids start, then spin off into a particular college from there. If you want to be an engineer, you start from day one as an engineer,” says Steidel. “Our pre-college programs really help kids identify—and rule out—possibilities.”

Beyond the marketing potential for universities, pre-college programs also serve a more practical purpose. “It’s a way for the university to have community engagement and outreach while also fully utilizing its resources during the summer,” says Wade. “A lot of universities’ academic buildings and residence halls are underutilized during the summer. We are leveraging the resources we have in order to continue to provide services.”



PROGRAMMATIC ADVICE

If you plan to start a pre-college program or tweak one you already offer, consider the following:

Set clear goals

Work closely with all the stakeholders involved to ascertain your main objectives for the pre-college program. Is it to introduce students to a new major on campus or provide a holistic view of your school? Are you trying to attract a new demographic, such as out-of-state or international students?



Think beyond academics

Although the focus of most pre-college programs is on the classes offered, consider adding in other components that appeal to students. Emory partners with offices across campus, such as the Writing Center and Campus Life, to lead its College 101 sessions. Staff from Residence Life also introduce students to greater Atlanta through extracurricular activities, including evening and weekend excursions to a Braves game, Zoo Atlanta, the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola.

Add programs for low-yielding populations

Carnegie Mellon has tuition-free programs for first-generation students, low socioeconomic students and other under-represented populations. “These programs aren’t about exposing students to college-level work,” says Steidel. “It’s about making sure they are in the pipeline for college and their preparation for the next step is as strong as it can be.”



Team up with schools across campus

Emory’s pre-college programs are part of the College of Arts and Sciences, but the school offers some classes associated with the Goizueta Business School, the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing, the Rollins School of Public Health and others. “It allows us to work closely with faculty and partners on interesting work they may be doing that wouldn’t normally be a part of arts and sciences,” says Wade.

Collect data on participants

Required documentation and enrollment management can be eased by streamlined data collection. However, you can utilize your software system even further to collect and analyze data to help in decision-making about your pre-college program and university at large, such as curricula development.



Connect with peers

When Emory started its pre-college program a decade ago, it reached out to colleagues from other universities that had established programs. “We even sent reps to visit and observe other programs, and they were extremely gracious,” says Wade. “That really helped us to determine best practices and, given Emory’s strengths and weaknesses, decide where we wanted to situate our program.”

Each university should create pre-college programs that fit their goals and culture. Doing so will benefit not only the school, but participants, too.

“Pre-college programs are a great precursor to college life,” says Steidel. “They can help kids reduce some of the stress and anxiety associated with heading to college, and the programs allow them to think more broadly about the opportunities that might be available to them when they get there.”



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