



## HARVEY MUDD COLLEGE PROFILE And Judging Performance at HMC

**DISTINCTIVE EDUCATION** A member of the Claremont Colleges, Harvey Mudd College is a residential college that is widely recognized for its programmatic innovation, excellence, and rigor. *U.S. News and World Report* has consistently ranked HMC among the top twenty undergraduate liberal arts colleges. In fact, the college was recently ranked first among college-based undergraduate engineering programs. Harvey Mudd College surpasses every undergraduate college in the United States in the percentage of its graduates who go on to earn Ph.D.s, and its alumni command high starting salaries in industry. The college's reputation rests on the excellence of its faculty and students, its independent spirit, the quality and innovation of its programs, and the high caliber of its graduates.

For a young, small college, Harvey Mudd has proven adept at recruiting top student applicants since its outset in 1957. The typical Harvey Mudd matriculant has offers of admission from the finest well-known liberal arts and research institutions throughout the country.

The heart and soul of the college are its students, young men and women who are among the scientific and technological elite of the United States. When reviewing the academic performance of individual students, it is important to recognize the intellectual and academic talent of the entire student body and to remember that these individual students have entered HMC with extraordinary credentials. Nearly all of them were in the top tenth of their high school classes, with top grades in mathematics and science, and in virtually every other subject. Nearly all scored a combined 1400 or higher on their College Board Scholastic Assessment Test. For a recently admitted class, the middle 50 percent on the SAT Mathematics test was 740-800 and the middle 50 percent scores ranged from 680-760 on the SAT Critical Reading test and on the SAT Writing test. In addition, about 30 percent of the students in each entering class are National Merit finalists.

The founders of Harvey Mudd College envisioned a distinctive educational experience for the college's students. As a result, the curriculum was designed to create scientists, mathematicians and engineers with unusual breadth in their technical education and a firm academic grounding in the humanities and social sciences.

The college is committed to preparing its students for immediate employment or for graduate and professional school. The curriculum is divided into four components: the Common Core, the program in Humanities and Social Sciences, the Majors and an Integrative Experience. Unifying these is an emphasis on strong oral and written communications, the development of computational skills, and direct experience with a research or design project. These focused and demanding academic programs occur in an environment that encourages team work and collaboration.

**JUDGING PERFORMANCE** In keeping with this distinctive mission and curriculum, the college takes very seriously the judging of the academic performance of its students. Faculty assign grades that measure not only performance on tests and assignments but a level of mastery of the subject matter as well. The rigor of the curriculum is reflected in the rigor of the grading; over the 50-year plus history of the college only six students have earned straight A's for all four years of study.

This statement outlines the factors involved in judging the academic performance of Harvey Mudd College students and is presented to inform people, such as prospective employers and graduate-level admission officers, of the grading practices and history of the college so that they may judge the performance of individual graduates within the academic context of Harvey Mudd College

The college recently reviewed grade point averages earned during the past two decades. Some grade inflation has occurred in the past 15 years – consistent with that at other similar institutions. But this increase began from a relatively low base point (3.12 in 1991). So that the current median GPA (3.35 in 2007) continues to lag as much as two tenths of a point behind many peer institutions. In addition, GPA's at Harvey Mudd tend to be lower during the first two years when students are engaged in a rigorous and broad core curriculum. They typically increase in later years when students are focused on courses in their major.

It is impossible to produce a direct comparison of grading at Harvey Mudd with that at other colleges and universities. However, it might be useful for the reader to know that semester GPA's earned by Harvey Mudd College students while studying abroad are a half grade point higher than those earned on campus – for the same types of courses.

**FURTHER MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE** Given the educational experience at Harvey Mudd College, overall grade point average is a potentially misleading measure of a student's academic performance. The student's GPA in his or her major, as well as rank in that major, are better indicators of aptitude and performance in the major field of study. In addition, faculty letters of recommendation often carry more weight, especially with graduate programs, than the transcript. Also Mudd students have traditionally done very well on standardized graduate and professional entrance exams such as the GRE, MCAT, GMAT, and LSAT.

In sum, the college believes that when reviewing a Harvey Mudd College student's transcript, it is important to look beyond the student's overall GPA to their entire educational experience. Harvey Mudd College faculty believe the unusual rigor and breadth of the College's curriculum produces an extraordinarily capable and versatile graduate fully prepared for the challenges of their graduate and professional lives.