

No More Rehearsals

Helping Your Student Prepare for the Visual and Performing Arts Supplement

Drama parent. You know who you are. If you were to open the trunk of your car right now, you might find half of a costume from the last *Fiddler on the Roof* play at your daughter's high school. In the glove compartment, you'd probably find extra glue or safety pins—just in case someone in the theater dressing room needs them. On your dresser mirror, you just might find ticket stubs from the last ten years: *Les Miserables*, *Grease*, and *Alice*. Your home-video collection is an eclectic mish-mash of your daughter's acting progression—directing the neighborhood kids in a home-grown movie all the way to her directing her final, high school play in the local theater program.

It's been a fun, sometimes exhausting journey and now she stands on the threshold of college. She tells you she wants to continue her education in visual and performing arts and study her craft in college. Up until now, you've been able to support her growing interest, but this new chapter seems unfamiliar. You've heard there might be auditions or portfolios to submit and at first glance it all looks pretty daunting. Thankfully, all of the hours of practice and preparation your daughter has put in have prepared her for this moment. Your job as a parent is to help her understand the requirements and then support her as she completes each task.

The first big question many parents ask is, "What kind of degree can she get in visual and performing arts?" Students have a broad range of choices. Degrees called Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) or Bachelor of Music (B.M.) are designed for students who are very serious about their art and intend to use their skills professionally. These programs are typically comprised of intense study of the chosen art. Some universities strictly offer a Bachelor of Art (B.A.) degree in visual and performing arts disciplines. These degrees frequently offer courses in the art major as well as in other liberal arts subjects. Students studying for a B.A. can sometimes choose to minor in another subject, double-major, or even choose to minor in art and major in a non-VPA subject. Your discussion with your teen should center on figuring out how serious she is about pursuing a career in piano – or computer animation – or dance, as examples, and then deciding what type of program best meets that need.

The next big consideration is the portfolio (for art and computer graphic students) or the audition (for music, dance, or theater students). You can best support your son by encouraging him to carefully read through the requirements and deadlines set by each college. These are typically very strict requirements, so it is imperative that your student take care to get it right. Encourage your son to get outside feedback on his skills. As parents, we are good at telling our teens how great they are however, your son needs an unbiased opinion on his strengths and weaknesses. If he's an art student, help him make an effort to attend one of the National Portfolio Days (<http://www.portfolioday.net/>) to get a review of his portfolio from college representatives. Your son should also ask for feedback from current and past VPA teachers.

If your son becomes overwhelmed with the specific portfolio requirements, remind him to look through his collection of creations from art class. Music and drama students should choose musical or dramatic pieces that they are comfortable with and that will highlight strengths. Double-check that he has scheduled his audition well before the deadline or set a personal deadline to complete his portfolio with plenty of time for review before submission.

As a parent of a VPA student, you should be very proud. Many colleges and professions highly respect the multitude of hours your teen has spent perfecting her art and they will see that effort as signs of dedication and persistence. With a little gentle support, you'll be receiving invitations from her to come to her college performance or gallery showing. You know the saying ... "Practice makes perfect!"