

HIGH BLUFF ACADEMY

VOTED #1 PRIVATE SCHOOL
BEST OF NORTH COAST READER'S POLL



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Letter From the Director Jill Duoto



Over the past 35 years, I have had the pleasure of living and teaching in Brazil, China, Colombia, Japan, and Singapore. What I loved most about international education was the blending of student cultures, which took the best from each nationality. American students in Asia became more disciplined while Asian students learned to take risks and express opinions. In Brazil, students prioritized friends and fun, balancing work and play. These experiences enabled me to curate the best from each academic culture into a program for our students here in the United States.

HBA provides a solid foundation in math, science, and the humanities, and also encourages intellectual curiosity, ideological debate, and respect for the diverse experiences and perspectives among teachers and classmates. This model worked for Jill's son, Bryan, who went on to do stem cell research at Stanford and receive a PhD in Nanoengineering from the University of California, San Diego, and has worked for hundreds of students since.

Our mission to provide an academic environment that meets the uniqueness of each child and family has only proven to be more critical in today's world. Researchers at Vanderbilt observed that in the U.S. "we inherited an industrial model school system that sometimes treats children as interchangeable widgets" and argue that education should be more personalized to the abilities of each child. This is nearly impossible in large school environments, public or private, but we do it here at HBA every day by working with students and parents to create challenging and goal-oriented class schedules; engaging students in small classes; providing individual instruction to address deficiencies and enhance capabilities; and encouraging interests through clubs and community service. At HBA, teachers and staff meet students where they are, then take them farther than they thought possible.

I invite you to turn the page to see what HBA has to offer. We think you will be impressed and hope you will become a member of the HBA community.

College and Career Counseling



At HBA, we meet with every student to help them explore careers and college majors, and to determine their course selections. We also help students to curate a resume which includes community service, clubs, competitions, internships, and work-study to create a narrative which makes their college applications come alive. Parents are invited to participate in this ongoing process throughout their time at HBA.



Nick Duoto – Director of Student Services

Nick holds a degree in Kinesiology and a College Counseling Certificate from UCSD and has been working with students at HBA since 2014. As Director of Student Services, he helps each student to find their passion outside of the classroom and craft their college admission narrative.



Kristen Ho – Director of International Student Services

Kristen, a UCSD graduate in economics, also holds a College Counseling Certificate. A native of Hong Kong who speaks Cantonese and Mandarin, she specializes in working with our Chinese-speaking families, helping them to understand the complexities of the U.S. college application process.



When HBA junior Dmitry needed advice about choosing a STEM major, Nick called alumnus Konstantin who graduated from UCSD in Software Engineering. He previously worked at Qualcomm and is currently with Apple. Konstantin was able to provide Dmitry the most up-to-date information in the field.

“HBA has turned my daughter’s life around. The kids here are so accepting. She has become interested in cultures around the world. It has been a life-changer for her.”
Caroline Baddour, mother of Allie, Class of 2024

Mathematics



Math Chair Ethan Alvarée with Kevon Baha 2024 (UCSC) and Julia Brumer 2025

HBA believes that anyone can master math once they have grasped the fundamental concepts. We use AI software to assess and analyze gaps in knowledge and, if necessary, reteach basics as far back as elementary school. Time and again, we see that once students experience success, they enjoy using their new skills.

For students who have exceptional math skills, HBA offers advanced college-level courses typically unavailable to high schoolers, such as Multivariable Calculus, Linear Algebra, and Group Theory, in addition to AP courses. Not only does this prepare our students for success in STEM majors at top universities but also cultivates a deep, mathematical way of thinking that benefits them in all areas of life.

“I am so lucky to work at HBA as a math teacher. HBA is unlike other schools in that it is full of teachers who LOVE what they do and the priority is the students’ well-being.”

Maya Hankin, Math Teacher



“Maya is the first teacher to legitimately make me enjoy and understand math.”

Jack Chandonnet, Class of 2024

Maya Hankin
Math Teacher

“Ethan has inspired me to pursue mathematics. I love their way of teaching, their helpful explanations and the never-ending life lessons that accompany math class. Thank you for giving me the tools that I will forever carry with me.”

Liad Shaphir, Class of 2024, UC Berkeley Math Major



Humanities

A distinct advantage to small classes is the opportunity for in-depth discussion and debate, the hallmark of successful humanities classes. HBA humanities teachers foster safe classrooms where students can share informed opinions and learn to listen to, respect, and appreciate differing views. Additionally, the faculty works together to enhance curricular crossovers between history, literature, and art, creating a stronger understanding within each discipline.



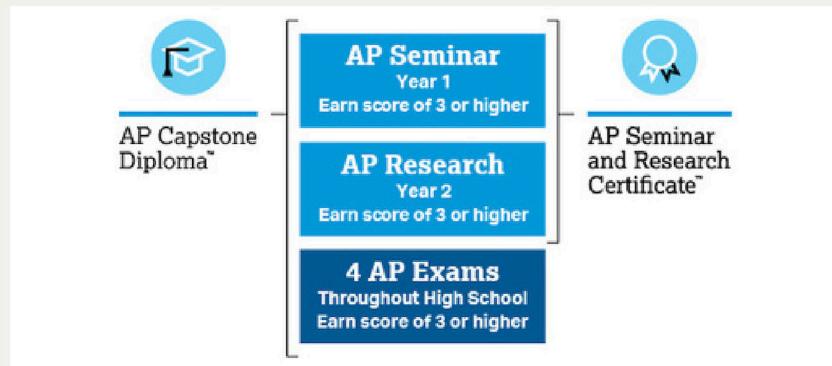
Ellen Sullivan
English Chair



Geoffrey Stevens
History Chair

AP Capstone Diploma Program

HBA is a College Board certified AP Capstone School. Students take two humanities research courses: AP Seminar and AP Research. Combining these courses with any other four AP classes earns the prestigious AP Capstone Diploma.



AP English Language
AP English Literature
AP Seminar
AP Research

AP World History
AP Human Geography
AP US History
AP Government

AP Macroeconomics
AP Microeconomics
Spanish 1-4
AP Spanish



Class reading *The Alchemist* with Ellen

"I've never met a teacher who truly believes in her students so much...I get to follow my dreams because she continues to give me the tools to do so."

Julia Brumer, Class of 2025.



"Thank you for being such an awesome teacher. Your classes are always fun and interesting, and I learn so much from you. Thanks for everything you do to help us succeed."

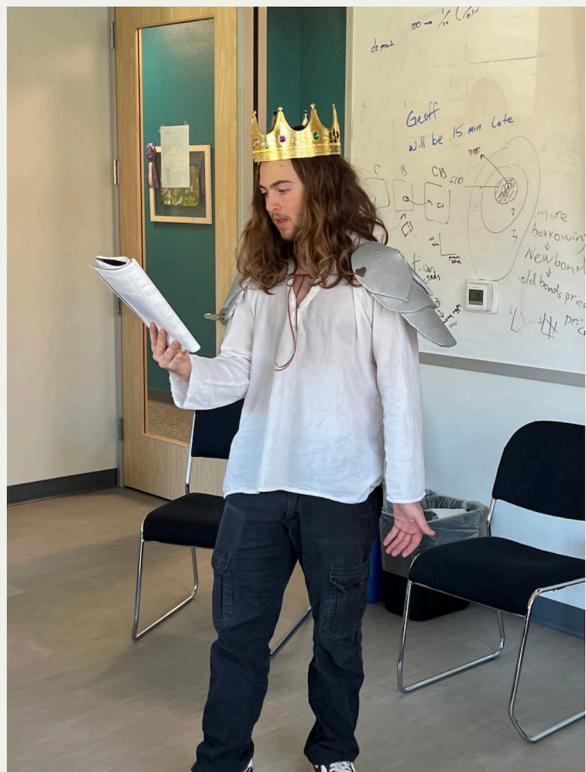
Aqila Mohammadi, Class of 2024



Profesora Fran Dickson with Arlene

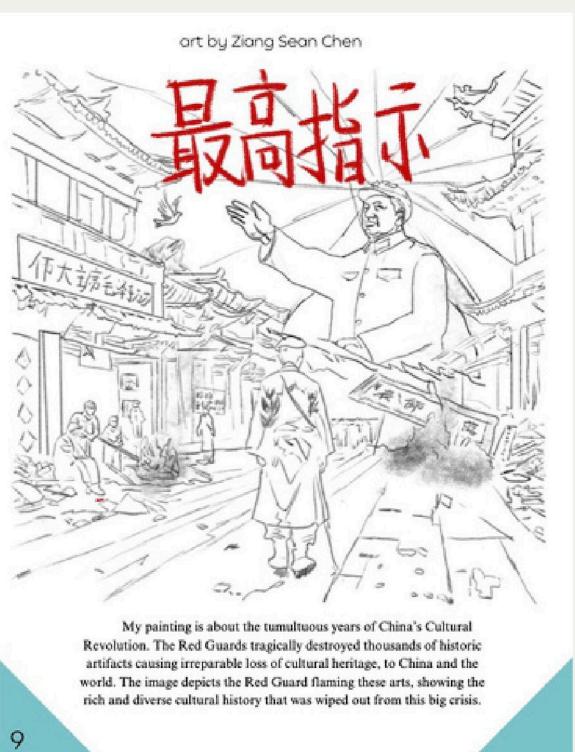
"My son Alan came from a big public school. He enrolled in Ellen's summer English class. She gave him a passion for writing. Enrolling in HBA his junior year was the best decision ever. He got accepted into 100 percent of the schools he applied to. In addition to attending the top school of his choice, he made good, long-lasting friendships here."

Carmen Rodriguez, mother of Alan, Class of 2024



Liad as Macbeth, AP English Literature and Composition class

Sean's drawing of the Chinese Cultural Revolution



Science and Computer Science

Whether students coming to HBA already love science or not, our philosophy is that it should be accessible and interesting to everyone. Time and again, our energetic and enthusiastic teachers inspire reluctant students to discover their inner scientists through engaging discussions, hands-on exploration, and practical applications. For those already planning to pursue science degrees in college, we offer classes that take them well beyond the high school level.

Course Offerings

AP Biology

Advanced Topics in Biology: Genetics

Advanced Topics in Biology: Molecular and Cellular

AP Chemistry

AP Environmental Science

AP Physics 1 & 2 (Algebra-based)

AP Computer Science Principles

AP Computer Science A

AP Psychology

Machine Learning (College level)

AP Physics C (Calculus-based)



George Humphreys
Principal and Science Chair

Graduates with science majors

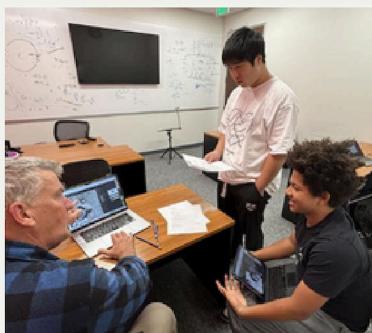
- Nick Zhang (2024) - UC Santa Barbara, Computer Science
- Saina Vijay (2024) - UC Berkeley, Neuroscience
- Alex Zou (2024) – USC, Environmental Studies
- Kevon Baha (2024) - UC Santa Cruz, Cognitive Science
- Nakul Mehta (2023) – UC Berkeley, Data Science
- Tracy Le – UC Davis Engineering
- Xamsiya Tuerhongjiang – U.C. San Diego Biochemistry (2023)
- Thy Nguyen – UCSD Aerospace Engineering (2025)
- Van Huynh – UC Irvine Engineering (2025)
- Bryan Duoto – UCSD Nanoengineering (PhD 2025)

Electives

Friday mornings at HBA are fun. They provide a welcome break from the Monday-Thursday academic routine, focusing on creativity and community. This is the day we offer electives, which vary from year to year depending on student interests and graduation requirements. One of our consistent classes, and a school favorite, is the Cooking Class because they make delicious and nutritious lunches for the whole school to enjoy.

Electives over the years have included:

- College Counseling
- Community Service
- Computer Programming
- Cooking
- Digital Art
- Drama
- Golf
- Hiking
- Logic and Philosophy
- Public Speaking
- SAT Prep
- Social Media and Marketing
- Visual Art
- Yearbook



“I like how we have free food on Fridays that George and the cooking elective makes for us. I also like how everybody is really nice there and it’s easy to make friends.”

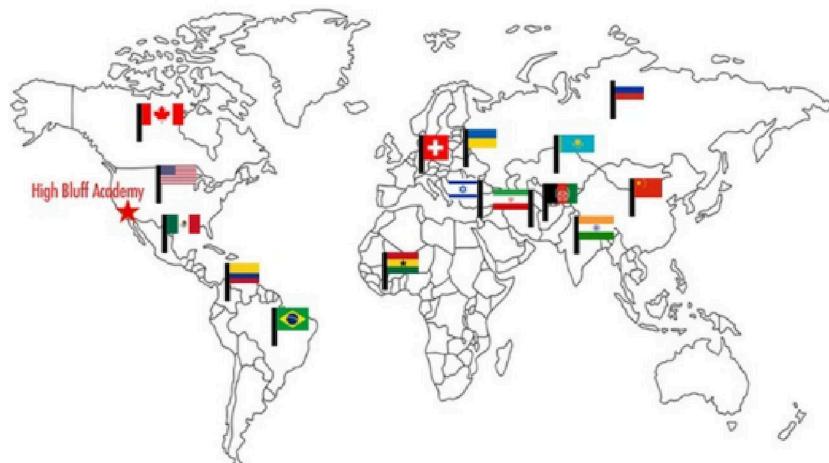
Srinika Danaya, Class of 2027

International and ESL Program

Arriving in the United States for the first time from another country can be a daunting experience. HBA works closely with students, parents, and homestays to make the transition to San Diego as welcoming and smooth as possible. As a result, we have students who come from all over the world creating a unique community within the school. Between classes, it is likely you will hear students greeting each other in Mandarin, Persian, Russian, and Spanish. The sharing of cultures, religions, and languages is celebrated school-wide and contributes to the energy that is felt in and out of the classroom.

Our students hail from:

- Afghanistan • China • India • Mexico • Switzerland
- Brazil • Colombia • Iran • Kazakhstan • Ukraine
- Canada • Ghana • Israel • Russia • United States



Tricia Tigli - ESL Chair

Growing up in a Polish-speaking family in Paris, Ms. Tigli's exposure to language started young. She moved to the U.S. at the age of 10 and perfected her third language, English. Tricia is a world traveler, making her the perfect teacher and advisor for our international students. She teaches ESL, TOEFL prep, French and history.

Our International Students



In addition to students from China, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Tajikistan, the class of 2024 included three refugee students on scholarship. Yeva Cherkasova from Ukraine, and Mohammad and Aqila Mohammadi from Afghanistan. The students at HBA were exceptional in welcoming these students to America and including them in many activities outside of school. In return, these students shared their harrowing experiences giving HBA students an insight into the resilience of the human spirit.



Clubs

At the beginning of each school year, students and staff decide which clubs to establish for the year. This allows students to explore their individual and collective interests, making each year new and different. In addition to Associated Student Body (ASB), which organizes fun events throughout the year, HBA students have organized the following clubs over the past several years:

- Art|Poetry|Prose Magazine
- Associated Student Body (ASB)
- Chess
- Drone Programming
- Journalism (school paper *The Flyby*)
- Model United Nations (MUN)
- National Honor Society (NHS)
- Quiz Bowl
- Yearbook
- Young Investors with Wharton School of Business



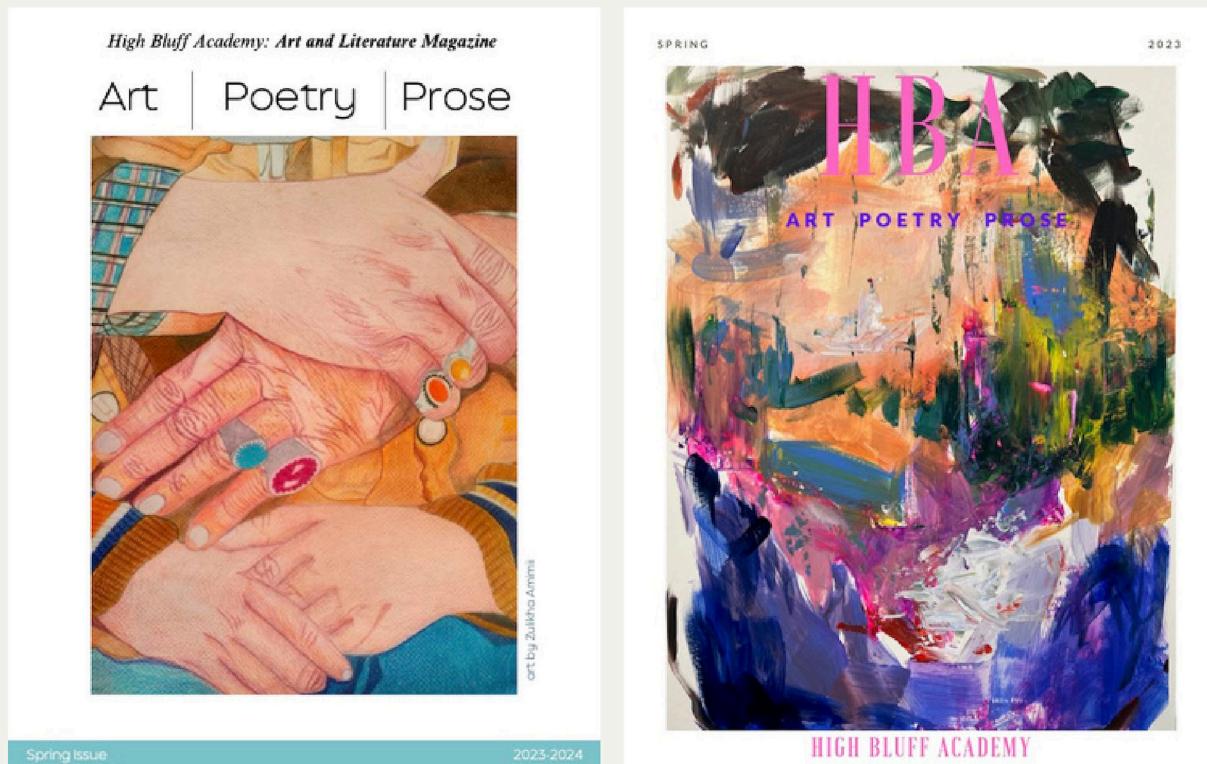
Tair Narynov (lower left) representing the U.S. at the MUN Yalta simulation. Tair is an international student from Kazakhstan.

These unique experiences enhance college applications as proven by our impressive college admissions results.

Art|Poetry|Prose



In 2021, English teacher Ellen Sullivan started Art|Poetry|Prose, HBA's award winning art and literary magazine. The magazine has won acclaim from the National Council of Teachers of English through their Recognizing Excellence in Art and Literary Magazines (REALM) for high school and college publications as well as First Prize at the San Diego County Fair Student Showcase. HBA's student body is diminutive, but its talent is prodigious.



Community Service

Community service is an integral part of the HBA education. It provides a valuable service to the organizations we volunteer with and creates community between students, staff, and parents. Over the years, we have worked with a variety of charities -- from an orphanage in Tijuana to Toys for Tots -- but most recently we have focused on educating girls. This began in 2022 when HBA sponsored and interacted online with students at Escuela Vera Angelita, an all-girls boarding school set within the cloud forest of Nicaragua. This was an excellent opportunity for our students to practice their Spanish language skills. In 2023, HBA students and staff switched hemispheres and began tutoring and teaching girls in Kabul, Afghanistan, as part of a program established by Jill Duoto to provide qualified girls, who are denied an education under the Taliban, with an American high school diploma.



HBA students experienced a simulation of life in a slum at this mobile exhibit.



Middle school girls in Nicaragua wearing HBA t-shirts delivered by teacher Ellen Sullivan on her trip to visit Escuela Vera Angelita.



HBA students playing a Spanish-English language game online with students in Nicaragua.



HBA Kabul

In 2023, High Bluff Academy and an education center in Kabul, Afghanistan worked together to form HBA Kabul to educate girls through an underground school. Initial grant funds provided laptops and Wi-Fi to over 150 girls in Kabul, enabling them to join classes online at HBA and all over the world in preparation for graduating high school with an American diploma. In May 2024, we had our first graduating class.

There are currently 500 students in the American high school degree program in Kabul. All classes are taught in English, including American History and American Government. Most of the girls are Hazara, an ethnic group targeted by the Taliban and ISIS for genocide.

Every Friday morning during the 2023-24 school year, HBA students logged on live with the girls to share in educational presentations, tutoring, and friendship. HBA students also held fundraising events and researched grants and scholarships available to Kabul graduates.

The connections created between students in San Diego and Kabul proved to be personally and academically rewarding. For example, Alexander Griffin and Zuhra Abdally became online friends, and the two partnered to submit a video to the 2024 Elie Wiesel Visual Art and Literature Competition as part of their English class. Their video on the current plight of girls in Afghanistan won first place.



Alumni

Saina's Case Study



3 years spent at HBA (transferred from Valley Christian)

College Acceptance List:

UC Berkeley (Enrolled) Major: Neuroscience
UCLA
UC Davis
UC Irvine
UC San Diego
UC Santa Barbara
UC Santa Cruz
Scripps College
Claremont McKenna College

15 AP Courses Taken:

AP Chemistry, AP Macroeconomics
AP Seminar, AP Psychology
AP Research, AP World History
AP Biology, AP US History
AP Calc AB, AP Calc BC
AP English Language, AP Physics 1
AP English Literature, AP Gov & Politics
AP Stats

Awards:

Valedictorian
AP Scholar with Distinction
AP Capstone Diploma

Extracurricular Activities:

- Published a book for children on the brain and used it in lessons with elementary students.
- Made special science kits: neuron kit & brain kit to teach to students in my community.
- Started a club called Building Blocks which brings high quality STEM education to disadvantaged students in the U.S.
- Started the Period Initiative: campaigned for menstrual products, fundraised, & distributed resources in rural India.
- Started a club called *Andha* which implements virtual science programs to visually impaired students across the globe.
- Clinical Neuroscience Immersion Experience (CNI-X) at Stanford analyzing the effects of postpartum psychosis.
- Rady's Children Hospital volunteer.

Liad's Case Study



2 years spent at HBA (transferred from Westview)

College Acceptance List:

UC Berkeley (Enrolled) Major: Math
UC Davis
San Diego State
Cal Poly SLO
UC Riverside

12 AP/College Level Courses Taken:

Multivariable Calculus, AP Chemistry
AP Physics 1, AP English Literature
AP Macroeconomics, AP Gov & Politics
Linear Algebra, AP Calculus AB & BC
AP Physics C Mechanics, AP Comp Sci A
AP Physics C E & M, AP English Language

Awards and Extracurricular Activities:

- President of ASB
- AP Scholar
- National Honor Society
- Initiated the establishment of a math club and took the initiative to teach an online precalculus class to girls in Afghanistan. Additionally, Liad has been teaching math to two Afghan students at our school, showcasing his commitment to making a global impact through education.



Alex's Case Study

3 Years at HBA (Transferred from San Joaquin High School)

College Acceptance List:

USC (Enrolled) Major: Environmental Studies
UC Davis
UC Irvine
UC Santa Cruz
Rutgers
Brandeis
Syracuse
Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Chapman
Pepperdine

9 AP/College Level Courses Taken:

Organic Chemistry
AP Biology
Multivariable Calculus
AP Calc AB
AP Calc BC
AP Physics 1
AP Physics C
AP US Gov
AP Micro
AP Chemistry
Statistics

Awards and Extracurricular Activities:

- Founded two clubs focused on fundraising for various medical and educational purposes.
- Leadership role in the Non-Toxic Club which was founded in conjunction with the former interim mayor of Irvine, a cancer survivor with an interest in reducing chemical exposure of the residents.
- Gold for the President's Volunteer Service Award for the past four years.
- Helped our school win first place in the Aerospace Robotics Competition (ARC), which is a programming competition for drones.



Audrey's Case Study

3 Years spent at HBA

College Acceptance List:

NYU (Enrolled) Major: Undeclared
University of Florida
UC Davis
UC Irvine
UC San Diego
UC Riverside
Boston University

14 AP and College Level Classes Taken:

Multivariable Calculus, AP Chemistry
AP Physics 1, AP Physics 2
AP Macroeconomics, AP Gov & Politics
Linear Algebra Group Theory
AP Calculus AB & BC
AP Statistics, AP Biology
AP Computer Science Principles
AP Environmental Science

Extracurricular Activities:

- While home during summer in China, Audrey used her JAVA programming ability to design the front-end user interface for a software company that monitors adherence to safety standards at construction sites.
- Travelled to Xinjiang province by herself on behalf of the company, spending ten days monitoring the health of poor workers with the company's software. She also volunteers in a medical laboratory.



Amanda's Case Study

College Acceptance List:

UCLA (Enrolled), Major: Environmental Science
UC Berkeley
Cal Poly SLO

8 AP Courses in addition to 7 community college classes:

AP Physics 2, AP Biology
AP Statistics, AP Seminar
AP Environmental Science
AP Calculus AB
AP Computer Science A
AP Spanish

Extracurricular Activities:

- Captain at Clean Ocean Action for over three years, a leader in Project Aware environmental club, and a citizen scientist at Coral Watch.
- Started the Environmental Club.
- Involved in college and graduate-level research in marine science. She attended SEA Quest and Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and Marine Quest at UNC Wilmington.

Ivy League Acceptances 2024



Benjamin Singer
Dartmouth

Double Major: Math and Music
Minor: Education

Ben combined 12 AP classes at HBA with college courses at UCSD. Ben is a competitive swimmer and golfer and a concert pianist.



Cindy Cai
Yale

Major: Biology

Cindy studied at HBA for the flexibility she needed until transferring back to CCA for graduation.

2024 University of California & CSU HBA Graduate Acceptances

	Overall Acceptance Rate	HBA Graduate Acceptance Rate
UC Berkeley	11%	43%
UCLA	9%	11%
UC San Diego	24%	38%
UC Santa Barbara	26%	33%
UC Irvine	21%	63%
UC Davis	37%	89%
UC Santa Cruz	47%	88%
Cal Poly SLO	30%	100%
San Diego State	39%	75%

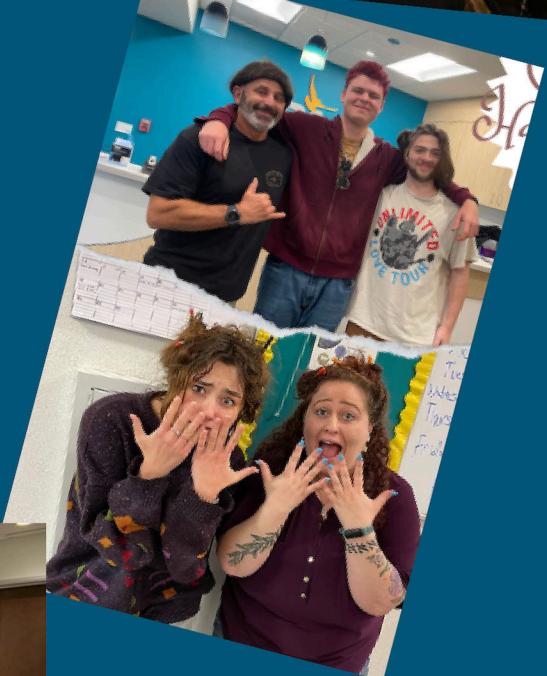
2024 TOP 100 College HBA Graduate Acceptances

*Data gathered from US News and World Report

	Overall Acceptance Rate	HBA Graduate Acceptance Rate
New York University	12%	50%
University of Washington	48%	50%
USC	12%	17%
Boston University	14%	50%
Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	45%	100%
Syracuse	51%	67%
Massachusetts-Amherst	64%	100%
Loyola Marymount	41%	100%

Pass Rate HBA vs. Global AP Exam Results

	HBA Passing Rate	Global Passing Rate
AP Precalc	3.75 (mean)	3.42 (mean)
AP Calc AB	81.6%	64%
Environmental Science	61%	54%
English Literature	84.6%	72.3%
Physics C: Mechanics	100%	76.3%
Physics C: E&M	100%	71.6%
Seminar	97.9%	85.7%
AP Government	75%	73%
AP US History	85.7%	72.2%
AP World History	100%	63.7%
AP Computer Science Prin	72.2%	64%
AP Comp Sci A	100%	67.2%



High Bluff Academy

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