

Virtual school is a cheater's paradise. It's a turn your camera off, in one ear out the other and take every shortcut possible type of place.

It's also the type of place that's amplified an already prevalent problem- toxic academia- which has an underlying effect on numerous schools.

"There's this academic standard that I have to achieve even though no one talks about it," class of 2021 alumni Joey Oh said. "You get looked down on if you don't meet this standard or if you don't take these classes and if you don't get this score."

From the outside, Huron boasts impressive rankings and scores. Niche Magazine has ranked Huron as the third best high school in Washtenaw County and third best college preparation high school in Michigan. In 2019, 61 percent of Huron's seniors had a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

Regardless, there is a lot going on behind the numbers.

Junior Natalie Muenz also feels this pressure to compete with her peers.

"For me and my friends, grades are really a top priority," Muenz said. "They always come up in conversations, and I hear that some got an A+ on a test while I got a 98 percent. I feel like I need to step it up even though it's just two percent."

Pressure that even comes from family.

"You have to have the GPA, you have to take the SAT and you have to load up and stress yourself out and get incredibly good grades," AP and DP Chemistry teacher Andrew Collins said. "I think that pushes people, just the system of it, to try to cut corners a little bit because they feel 'hey my sister did this, my brother did this, my parents did this, I can't be the one to let them down.' So there's a lot of pressure."

**A large part of the pressure and competition is driven by the college application process.**

"The main thing that I see is that the culture really emphasizes things that are tangible," class of 2021 alumni Rose Seidl said. "Our grades and GPA are tangible things that you can assess, but you can't really assess someone's understanding of something by just looking at things like that."

Accordingly, students find themselves prioritizing getting good grades instead of actually learning class material.

“The back of my mind is like ‘it’s just online learning. It’s not important,’” Muenz said. “It feels more optional so I’m not gonna really need this later.”

Even with a year of preparation after the pandemic first hit, teachers struggled to overcome this lack of motivation from students.

“I hate to say this, but I am going into this with the assumption that, even though it’s not meant to be this way, every kid is taking the tests, open book and open note,” Collins said. “What I did not expect is that kids would just take tests together on Discord. It is one thing to peek at your notes, it is completely another thing to simply copy someone else’s answer.”

Normally, Collins has designated days for students to look at tests when phones are prohibited in class. Outside of these days, Collins keeps all tests to prevent students from accessing tests from previous years.

“Last year, because of the snow day and the midwinter break, I had two classes one week behind one other class,” Collins said. “And so the first group has taken a test, and the second group is now coming up to take the test. I’m just assuming that many people have looked at the test already, or they have screenshots.”

To decrease cheating, Collins disabled the class Zoom chat during tests, but he acknowledges that they could still text or email each other. He also curves his tests based on the highest score, to discourage students from sharing answers. What he noticed was kids who cheated did not score as high on the actual AP exam.

Oh agrees that the curve discourages cheating.

“I think you would understand that if you unfairly raise the curve and you get a really good score but it’s not your score, you don’t deserve that,” Oh said.

Oh feels the message to students is “this is your workload, and I expect you to catch up without me teaching you and if you’re behind it’s your fault because you chose to have an AP class.”

With this mentality, students sometimes resort to cheating. But AP teachers understand the stress and try to combat this student mindset. Collins offers collaborative work days and is regularly available to students, provided that they reach out.

Teachers often offer extensions when students ask early for support and on a case-by-case basis revisions are offered. It becomes tough though when students compare grades. The mentality to get the A is still there.

Many times on assessment pass-back days, teachers see toxic-academia at its peak. Students are quick to compare grades and soon want to know how to get just one or two points more. AP 11 teacher Sara Neevel addresses this every time she hands back a graded essay.

“When students receive their graded papers or assignments in AP Lang, I always encourage students to not share grades with one another,” Neevel said. “I can see students tense up when papers are passed back because they don't want to share their grades with their classmates. I spend a good amount of time emphasizing that this is not something to compare, share, or ask about. Sure if students want to share with their peers, that's fine, but it gets out of hand when students receive a paper and the first thing they say is, "What did you get?!" That's not the purpose of an assignment and it depreciates the value of the feedback I give to help them improve.”

The do-it-yourself mentality of AP classes that Oh describes has been exacerbated during the pandemic.

“It's more like you have to be dependent on yourself and if you can't handle that pressure, you just resort to other resources so that you can handle it,” Muenz said.

Even with the social constraints brought on by the pandemic, it hasn't reduced the pressure on students.

“I don't think that the pressure to get a good grade has increased, but I think that it hasn't decreased,” Seidl said. “It's obviously so much harder now not only for students to actually pick up the material but also to focus from home all the time.”

Student mental health has also been impacted by the toxic academic culture. According to the Child Mind Institute, 32 percent of Americans will meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder by the age of 18 and 14 percent will be affected by a depressive disorder.

“I have witnessed many students experience panic attacks due to school related pressures,” psychology teacher Nadine Ghawi said. “I feel that students can still learn and be successful without the excessive pressure.”

The pandemic has only worsened the issue. According to a study conducted by the C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, “46 percent of parents say their teen has shown signs of a new or worsening mental health condition since the start of the pandemic in March 2020.”

Muenz is one of these students that feels like toxic academia and the pandemic has negatively impacted their mental health.

“I tend to focus all my energy into this competitive cycle of getting good grades and just trying to keep up with everyone else,” Muenz said. “It’s honestly exhausting and can sometimes feel never-ending.”

Last year AAPS attempted to lower the pressure on students by offering later start options, a block-schedule, assigning no-homework weekends and integrating SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) curriculum into advisory classes. Many of these options will continue.

“Teachers at Huron really try to combat toxic academia,” counselor Nichole Nunlee said. “They offer a lot of help and recognize that our students face a lot of stressors. They do their best to be supportive and accommodate student needs. They see students as much more than a grade.”

AP Statistics teacher Jeremy Schuitman is one of these teachers.

“It is important that students recognize two things: they are special and it is safe to communicate struggles,” Schuitman said.


Schuitman gives his students flexible deadlines and opportunities to make test-corrections in an attempt to relieve some stress from the virtual school year. He also made all the AP Statistic tests asynchronous, without a teacher monitoring test-taking.

“Cheating is happening, whether we are in school or not,” Schuitman said. “I kind of like that the responsibility is on each student. It is time to trust students more and treat them like the young adults they are. I hope that extending due dates and offering opportunities to make corrections gives students overwhelming options other than cheating.”

Good quotes:

“ I personally do not think it is a major problem in my classes. Most of my major assessments are writing and analysis, so it's typically hard or useless to cheat on them.” demoss


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Scholastic Aptitude Test

Mean Scores	<u>2017-18</u>	<u>2018-2019</u>
ELA	585	559
Mathematics	599	578
Average Score	1194	1137
Number Tested	378	366

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19/20	18/19	17/18	17/18	16/17	16/17	15/16
<b>14</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>25</b>

Huron High School, along with another high school from Michigan, shared the greatest number of National Merit Semifinalists in the State of Michigan in 2018

...ol is the most  
 ...ol in Ann Arbor.  
 ...e diversity.

STATE OF MICHIGAN IN 2019.



Huron High School was ranked 17<sup>th</sup>  
 in performing high schools in the state of Michigan in US News.

# NICHE magazine™

- Ranked #3 High School in Washtenaw County
- Ranked #8 Best Public High School in Michigan
- Ranked #10 Best High School for STEM in Michigan
- Ranked #3 Best College Prep Public High School in Michigan



## ADVANCED PLACEMENT (Examinations taken May 2019)

Biology	30	Calculus AB	32
Calculus BC	55	Chemistry	55
Chinese Language & Culture	13	Computer Science A	20
Comp Science Principles	16	English Lang/Comp	68
English Lit/Comp	16	French Language & Culture	1
Japanese Language & Culture	2	Macroeconomics	65
Microeconomics	32	Physics C: Electricity & Mag	11
Physics C: Mechanics	51	Psychology	5
Spanish Language & Culture	28	Statistics	41
US Gov't & Politics	79	US History	88
5 Highest Honor	310		
4 Honor	216		
3 Creditable	136		
2 Pass	70		
1 No Credit	31		
Total Grades Reported:	708		
Total Number of Candidates:	342		
90% of the grades reported were 3 or higher			

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## SENIOR DISTRIBUTION

	<b>Number of Students</b>	<b>Perfect 4.0 GPA</b>	<b>Above 3.0 GPA</b>
<b>2016</b>	364	29 8%	215 60%
<b>2017</b>	319	19 6%	190 60%
<b>2018</b>	363	22 6%	202 56%
<b>2019</b>	398	27 7%	242 61%

# COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

The following are the colleges and universities that our 2019 graduates are attending.

Aima College	Eastern Michigan University	Ohio Dominican University	University of Frankfurt
American Trade School	Ferris State University	Ohio Technical College	University of Illinois at Urbana- Champaign
Art Institute of Pittsburgh - Online Division	Full Sail University	Princeton University	University of Kentucky
Atlanta Technical College	Grand Valley State University	Purdue University	University of Michigan
Baldwin Wallace University	Indiana University at Bloomington	Rutgers University-New Brunswick	University of Michigan, Dearborn
Berklee College of Music	Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis	Ryerson University	University of Michigan, Flint
Brown University	Ivy Tech Community College	Saginaw Valley State University	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities
Calvin College	Johns Hopkins University	School of the Art Institute of Chicago	University of Pittsburgh
Carleton College	Juniata College	Schoolcraft College	University of Toledo
Carnegie Mellon University	Kalamazoo College	South Carolina State University	University of Wisconsin, Madison
Case Western Reserve University	Lawrence Technological University	Spring Arbor University	Vassar College
Central Michigan University	Madonna University	Stanford University	Washington State University Tri-Cities
Cinema Make-up School	Marine Corps Institute	Syracuse University	Washtenaw Community College
Clark Atlanta University	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	Temple University	Wayne State College
Colby College	McGill University	Tennessee State University	Wayne State University
College for Creative Studies	Michigan Career and Technical Institute	The Ohio State University	West Virginia University
Concordia University Chicago	Michigan State University	The University of Iowa	Western Michigan University
Cornell University	Michigan Technological University	U.S. Marine Corps	Xavier University of Louisiana
Douglas J Aveda Institute - Royal Oak	Northwestern University	University of California, San Diego	Yale University
Duke University	Oakland University	University of Chicago	

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To begin with, students recognize that they must take certain graduation requirements within a tight 6-7 hour schedule. In addition to core graduation requirements, required elective credits like Personal Fitness, Health and Arts must be earned. Huron has always been an academically competitive school. The competition itself is driven by the college admissions game. While that competition isn't healthy, it is a reality that we all deal with. NUNLEE



Teachers at Huron really try to combat toxic academia. They offer a lot of help and recognize that our students face a lot of stressors. They do their best to be supportive and accommodate student needs. Teachers see students as much more than a grade. NUNLEE

So imagine a student that wants to take Multicultural Foods. It's a fun class where students try out international recipes, learn about nutrition and the important skill of cooking. As a counselor, I value that experience for my student, but sometimes it can be hard to convince students and parents because they are concerned it will hurt their chances to get into a selective college. If they allow me, I will try to work the class into their schedule and help them create the narration to colleges why the course is meaningful/fits into the student's overall college profile. Those type of courses not only helps create a more balanced schedule, but it also helps enrich the student's knowledge base and make them multi-dimensional. When we approach academic planning as an individual journey and create customized plans, I think we see happier and healthier students, which gets us closer to what high school should be like for students. Even more crucial in the pandemic era of education. NUNLEE

- You get looked down upon if you don't meet this standard or if you don't take these classes and if you don't get this score. No one ever says it to you like, "dude, you suck", but you still feel it. JOEY OH
- I know some teachers ~~like Mr. Collins~~, that think that if you make the test harder than less people will cheat because they're just going to give up on cheating which I think is horrible because that's just adding more stress to kids so they're more stressed about the test and trying to find a way to cheat on tests gets harder. JOEY
- I think if more teachers just cared more about, students, and when the students were behind, then that would make less cheating. Because they kind of just throw away students that are behind, and they blame them because they're lazy. JOEY
- you can't like completely get rid of cheating. It's inevitable it's just going to happen no matter what, but even like making that one more student, like actually enjoy the class more rather than being behind the whole year. Might I don't know, make them actually study. Joey

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