How to Make the Most of the Activities & Awards Section

PGHS Counseling
September 2026

Senior Shorts Information Series

Objectives

Objective 1

Introduce/reintroduce UC Comprehensive Review and how it relates to the overall application process. While Comprehensive Review is the terminology that the UC uses, all four-year colleges use a similar process to review applications. First-year comprehensive review ⭐

Objective 2

Identify and define the six areas of the *UC Activities and Awards Section*.

Objective 3

Provide guidance and examples for how to most effectively document student involvement outside of the classroom for the UC and other college applications.

Comprehensive Review
Activities and Awards Section

What is ‘comprehensive review?’

- The UC consider multiple factors beyond courses and grades to assess each student’s achievements, both in and beyond the classroom. *Comprehensive review helps campuses identify students who demonstrate the capacity to contribute to the intellectual life and community of the university.*

The UC is looking beyond your grades and classes for the ‘bigger picture.’ They value academics but also achievements and involvements outside of the classroom, which is why this section is so important.

What are the three key points the UC wants to see in this section?

- Commitment, Progression, and Leadership OR Action, Impact, Growth

What is UC looking for?

Commitment

How long has the student been doing that activity? How much time has been committed to it?

Progression

Has the student worked on a particular skill or activity? Can they demonstrate growth over time?

Leadership

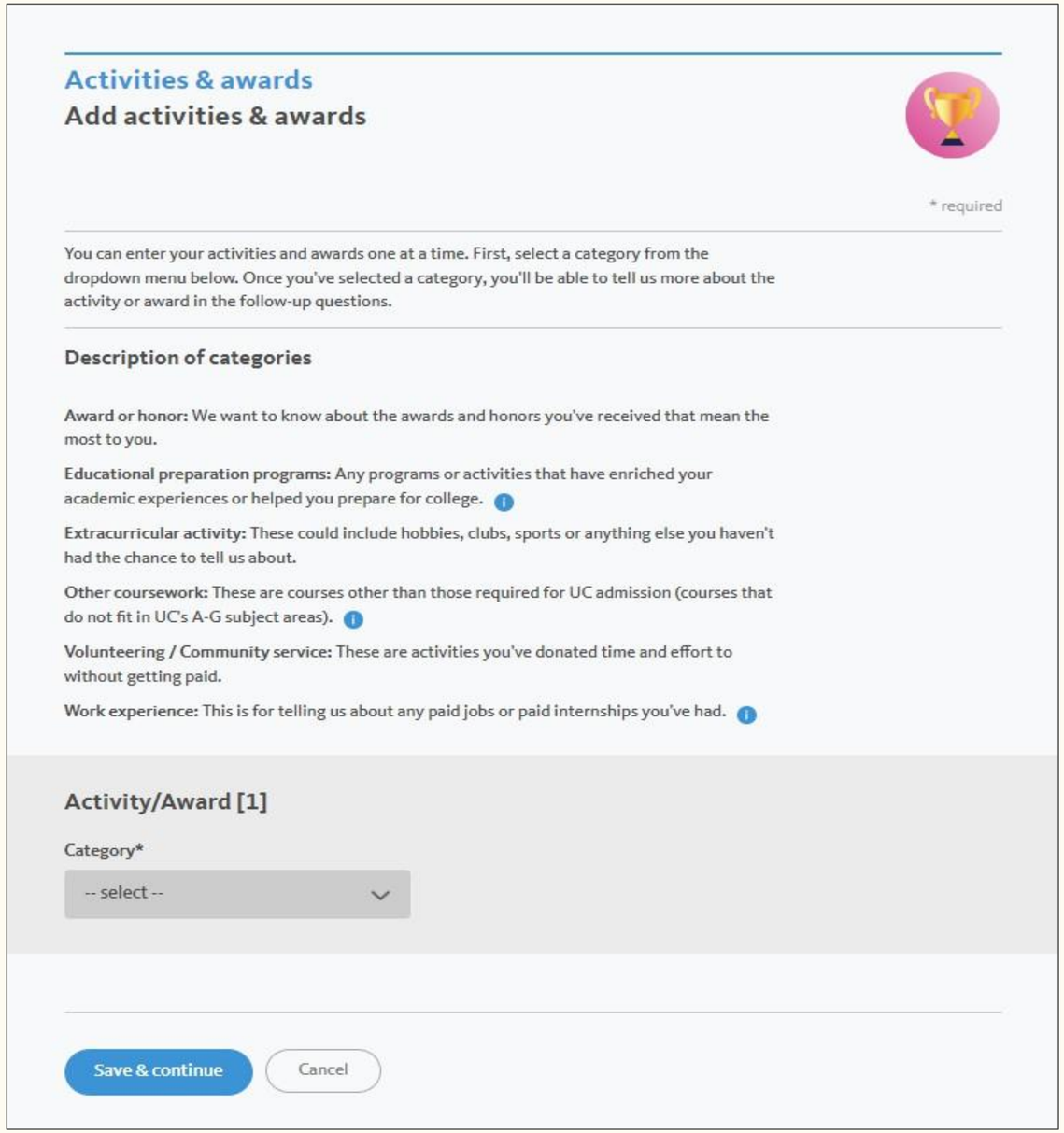
How has the student demonstrated leadership? What roles have they held?

Activities and Awards Section
6 Categories

- Awards & Honors
- Other Coursework
- Educational Preparation Programs
- Volunteering/Community Service
- Extracurricular Activities
- Work Experience

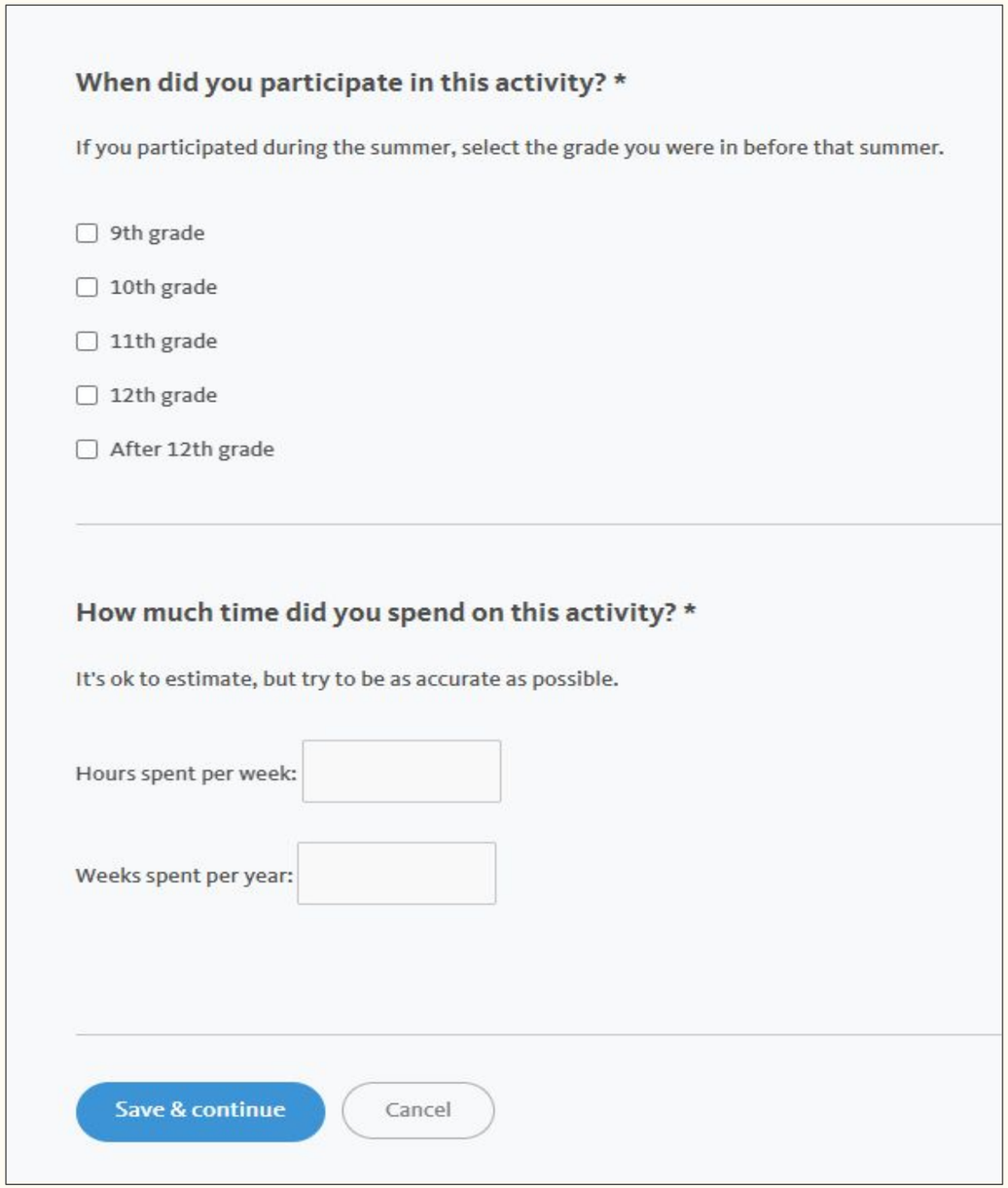
Quality over quantity

- Students can enter up to **20 activities & awards** across 6 different categories
- UC campuses have **no preference** for specific types of involvement



Consistency and commitment

- **Don’t forget about senior year**
- "After 12th grade" is meant for students who completed a gap year and for transfer students
- Use an average of hours spent on an activity if hours vary during the year



When did you participate in this activity? *

If you participated during the summer, select the grade you were in before that summer.

- [ ] 9th grade
- [ ] 10th grade
- [ ] 11th grade
- [ ] 12th grade
- [ ] After 12th grade

How much time did you spend on this activity? *

It's ok to estimate, but try to be as accurate as possible.

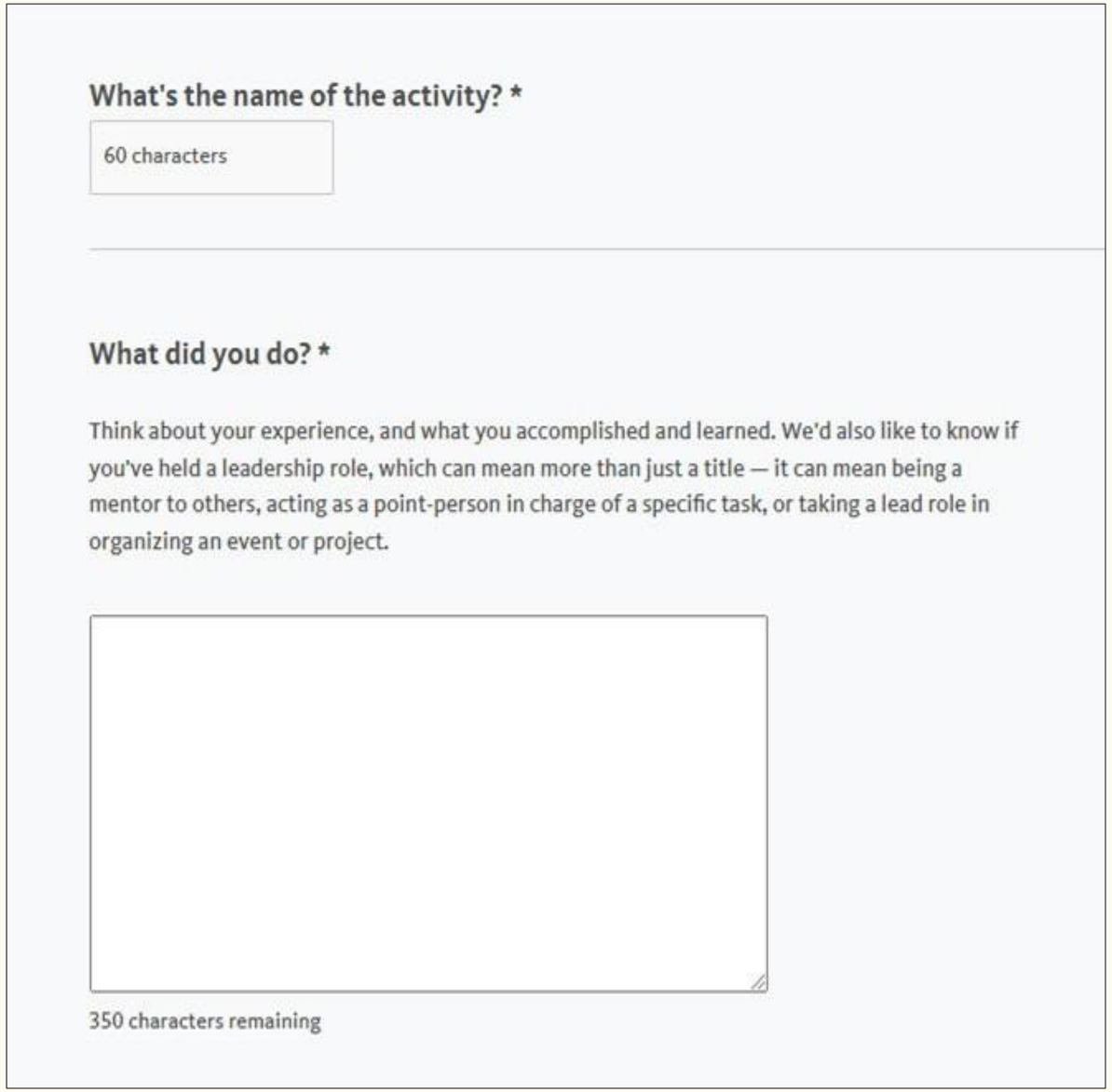
Hours spent per week:

Weeks spent per year:

Save & continue | Cancel

Details and content

- Students will have **60 characters** to name the activity
- **350 characters** to describe the activity
- Students should focus on ***their*** experience within the activity - what was their role, responsibility, etc.?
- Content > Formatting



General Guidelines for Success

- 350 characters are provided for you to describe the activity, specifically what you did or learned. Students are encouraged to think about their experience and their roles and responsibilities and not necessarily describe the activity itself.
  - For example, the UC doesn't need the student to share that football is a sport with 11 players on the field, tossing a ball, trying to score a touchdown.
- Students can also share in this section if they have participated in the activity for longer than just high school.
- When entering the details for each activity, you should focus on the content rather than the formatting. Students can present information in a more formal sentence structure, or in a bulleted format. Regardless of formating, the entry should be error free and organized.
- Avoid only using acronyms as a character saver, as the UC/your college may not know your program.

Awards & Honors

- This section is for students to add any awards or honors in or out of school they have received.
- In addition to the 350 characters allowed to describe your role in the activity, 250 characters are provided in the awards and honors section to discuss the eligibility requirements.
  - When sharing eligibility requirements, students should think about the following:
    - How are award recipients chosen?
    - How many people are selected to receive the award?
    - Is there an application or nomination for the award?
- Taken APs? Log into your College Board account to confirm if you are an AP Distinguished Scholar.
- Think about awards and honors in the context of your full life, not just your school life.
  - Have you received recognition at a music camp, sport camp, your church, volunteer organization?
    - Every acknowledgment, no matter how small, provides valuable insight into your personal growth and development. For instance, if you were recognized as the 'Most improved' at a water pool camp, be sure to include it and explain how that acknowledgment impacted you!

Educational Preparation Programs

- Include any programs (AVID, etc.) or activities that have enriched your academic experience or helped you prepare for college in this section.
- The UC will have a drop-down menu that includes UC-sponsored programs. If your program is not included, add it under the **OTHER** category.
  - Remember, the value of your program is not determined by its presence on a list. The UC's list is just a starting point, not an exhaustive record of all valuable experiences. The fact that your program was not on the drop-down has no impact on the value of the program or the way the UC will review your participation in the activity.
  - The UC drop-down list may jog your memory about similar types of experiences you've participated in so explore the section before you decide you have not participated in any educational preparation programs.
  - Remember those experiences on your other applications as well.

Extracurricular Activities

- Include hobbies, clubs, sports or anything else that you have not had the chance to share in the application.
  - ***Think about what you are doing when they are not sitting in class or sleeping.***
- There is no such thing as a “bad” or “filler” extracurricular activity and everything you report has the opportunity to add value to the application.
  - Are you an avid reader? Do you spend time on a non-traditional hobby like knitting or rebuilding a car?
- Regardless of the activity, it is important that you focus on the details that show how the activity demonstrates your *commitment, progression, and leadership*.
- **REMINDER**: President, Captain, Founder, etc. are not the only leadership positions or leadership opportunities.

Other Coursework

- This section is to capture <u>academic courses</u> that do not fit in the UC's A-G subject areas. *Have you taken college coursework that is non-transferable or transferable only to the CSU? Add it here!*
  - Other coursework includes CTE pathways (career/vocational courses) and/or non-transferable community college/college courses.
  - **PGHS CTE Pathways** include three years in Design & Media Arts, Engineering Design, Food Service & Hospitality (Culinary) and Software & Support Systems.
- Have you taken a community college/college courses of less than 3 credits?
  - The second and third year of Culinary Arts include multiple Dual Enrollment courses of less than 3 credits.
  - MPC offers art and music courses that PGHS students participate in that are not 3 credits.
  - Some summer programs at college campuses offer credits for participation. IF less than 3 credits OR non-transferable, include them in this section. *If more than 3 credits and UC transferable, add the course in the Academic History section under the college that provided the course*.

Volunteering/Community Service

- Activities in which you have donated your time and effort without getting paid are included in this section.
- **Unpaid internships** should be entered within the volunteer/community service category.
- Remember to provide context and quantify your experience as much as possible.
  - How did the volunteering show the UC/college my commitment, progression, and leadership?
  - 250 characters are provided to describe the organization where you volunteered.
  - The additional 350 characters are provided for you to describe <u>your role</u> in the activity.

Work Experience

- Work Experience includes any paid jobs and paid internships.
  - You can designate whether the work is during the summer or school year.
  - If you have worked different jobs, be sure to capture each job and the hours worked.
- If you work for a family business and are not paid for your hours, it can still be added as work experience.
- If you are responsible to care for your younger siblings or a family member after school, you may want to include that experience in your work experience.
- **Be sure to include how you have or will use your earnings.**
  - If you are not compensated for the hours you work, i.e. it is a family business or you are providing family care, be sure to include that information in this section.

Common Myths & Misconceptions
Awards and Activities Section

Readers only want to see school activities.

- Students should include school, community, county, state, national, and international involvements.

The (select a category) is the MOST important.

- No specific category in this section is more important than any other category.

They do not read this section anyway!

- This section is one of the ways that readers get to ‘know’ the student.

Common Missed Opportunities

Awards and Activities Section

Leaving this section blank

Assuming the UC knows the activity or acronym

Do not provide clarity on roles and responsibilities

Unaware of the importance of this section

Talk more about the activity than themselves

CASE STUDIES

Example 1: Honor or award

Honor/Award	Years Awarded	Level of Recognition
AP Scholar with Distinction	11th Grade	Statewide

Description

I took seven AP tests, 5 were offered as school classes and 2 were self-studied. I self-studied AP Environmental Science (9th) and Biology (10th).

Eligibility Requirements

This award is given to students who meet two criteria with their AP exams. They need to score a 3 or higher on at least 5 exams, and their overall AP score average has to be 3.5 or higher.

Example 2: Extracurricular activity

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
OverWatch Tournament Finalist Winner	9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Grade	22 hours per week, 52 weeks per year

Description
Out of 100 gamers, I placed 1st overall in my local single-elimination E-Sports tournament winning a $500 cash prize. The tournament requires a preliminary qualifier of over 300 players to play.

Example 3: Extracurricular activity

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Soccer (School & Club)	9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Grade	30 hours per week, 48 weeks per year

Description
Playing soccer competitively since elementary school. Play for school and club outside of school. Captain of both teams for the last two years. Organize practices with coaches. Lead drills. Work with members of the team. Host team bonding events for new and veteran members.

Example 4: Educational preparation program

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Destination College Advising Corps	12th Grade	1 hour per week, 32 weeks per year

Description
DCAC works to increase the opportunities and resources provided to first-generation, low-income, and underrepresented students who enter and complete college. They help students apply to colleges and financial aid, and also take us on college tours.

Example 5: Educational preparation program

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Destination College Advising Corps	12th Grade	1 hour per week, 32 weeks per year

Description
DCAC helps motivated high school students get a jump start on their college plans. It helped me know exactly what I had to do to get ready for college, helped me prepare for the application process, helped me find scholarships, understand what FAFSA is & how it could help me, and it taught me that I don’t know everything, it’s okay to ask for help.

Examples 6: Other coursework

Course	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
UCLA Summer Session: Design & Media Arts	11th Grade	32 hour per week, 2 weeks per year

Description
The classes explored a variety of media examining different practices and design methods applied to the domains of print, net, worlds, and video. All work focused on a common theme and all four classes contributed to the creation of an integrated, multimedia exhibition at the end of the session. I learned typography, “Worldbuilding” as a for

Example 7: Volunteer/community service

Activity	Years Participated	Hours Per Week Weeks Per Year
Second Harvest Food Bank	10th, 11th Grade	12 hours per week, 30 weeks

Description

As a lead volunteer, I would delegate my peers to take bulk items, like rice and beans, and disperse them into smaller portions to prepare them for distribution which involves weighing and some math. On other occasions, I package and hand out food drives.

Organization Description

The food bank currently serves over 400,000 people a year throughout 7 counties. Second Harvest distributes over 12 million pounds of supplemental groceries to families and individuals suffering from food insecurity.

Example 8: Employment

Where did you work?	When did you work?	Hours Per Week (include summer, if applicable)
[Redacted] Landscaping	9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Grade	~8 hours per week ~12 hour per week (summer)

What were your job responsibilities?

Helped my father mow lawns, trim flowers, set up dripping and sprinkler systems, check for problems with sprinklers and dripping, blow leaves, cut leaves/branches, rake leaves, and other general landscaping.

Describe the company or organization you worked for?

[Redacted] Landscaping Services has over 20 employees providing its services to surrounding cities.

Example 9: Employment

Job Title	When did you work?	Hours Per Week (include summer, if applicable)
Business Owner (Shopify)	9th, 10th, 11th, 12th Grade	~ 30 hours per week including summer

What were your job responsibilities?

I started a business selling custom clay earrings during the pandemic using Shopify. I sell market and manage all of my product to customers from all over the world. This business has supported me and my family.

Describe the company or organization you worked for?

Questions & Answers