

UPPER SCHOOL | 9-12

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

The Upper School offers a challenging and innovative college preparatory program that emphasizes discussion-based learning. The intellectual community is characterized by close student-faculty and student-student relationships that foster advanced inquiry, lively discussion around Harkness seminar tables, and deep engagement with ideas. The Upper School's 75-minute class periods provide time for broad exploration of ideas within each class and each discipline. The schedule also has built-in time during the school day for co-curricular activities, studying, and meeting with teachers, and allows for a balanced approach to homework. Students are energetic and informed participants in discussions, nuanced and accountable in their analysis, and articulate in their critique and defense of ideas. The program culminates in seminars that use college-level texts and require substantial independent work.

◆ SPA graduates are thoroughly prepared to excel and lead at the most demanding colleges and universities. While SPA has chosen not to offer designated AP (Advanced Placement) classes, our courses are designed to go well beyond the prescribed AP curriculum in depth and complexity. When SPA students elect to take AP exams, they are very successful: more than 67 percent of students who take an AP exam earn a score of 4 or 5, and more than 92 percent earn a score of 3 or above.

ENGLISH

In Journeys in Literature (Grade 9) and American Literature (Grade 10), students explore literature while building strong critical reading, expository and creative writing, and assertive yet generous discussion skills. Upper School English electives (for students in Grades 11 and 12) are semester-long courses focusing on expository and creative writing and the analysis of literature. Students apply critical lenses, develop literary awareness and appreciation, and demonstrate sophisticated expression of ideas in writing and in discussion. Reading lists feature classical and contemporary titles as students learn to navigate texts and explore metaphor and the power of stories. Recent electives include Shakespeare, Speculative Fiction, Writing Seminar, The Bible and Literature, Reading and Writing Memoir, Literature of Resistance, and New Global Voices. Robust, award-winning programs in debate, journalism, and theater encourage students to deepen skills in performance and print.

◆ All Grade 11 and 12 English electives may be used in preparation for the English Composition AP exam.

WORLD LANGUAGE

The Upper School offers Spanish through the 6th level, and Chinese, French, and German through the 5th level. Students in the early levels are expected to demonstrate growing proficiency in listening, reading, writing and speaking (Interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational modes), and master fundamental grammar patterns. Cultural units include Spain and the Hispanic influences in the United States; German speaking countries and German-American history; French-speaking countries; and traditional and modern Chinese life.

By the 4th and 5th levels, students continue to increase their proficiency in the three modes listed above and focus on advanced grammar. Substantive units on social and political issues of contemporary societies, economic developments, and cultural histories are also studied. Spanish students may take the capstone seminar, which explores political and social developments in Spain, Cuba, and the United States through novels, films, and current news sources.

◆ All 5th and 6th level language courses have AP themes integrated into the units and lessons, enabling students to prepare for the AP language exams.

HISTORY

In Upper School history courses, students gain historical perspectives, develop critical thinking skills, and refine discussion strategies. All students take a two-year world history sequence in Grades 9 and 10. Topics include classical empires, world religions, the post-classical world, revolutions, industrialization, globalization through colonialism and in the post-colonial world, and a formal history research process and paper each year.

In Grade 11, students complete a United States History course that includes a significant research component and work with various primary documents, scholarly secondary sources, and college level texts.

Senior elective seminars focus in depth on specialized topics. Seminars include Economics, History of Law, Government and Citizenship, History of Thought, US Foreign Policy Since World War II, Gender in the Americas, History of Refugee Communities, World Religions, History of Women in the World, and History of Race.

◆ World history and U.S. history courses may be used in preparation for AP exams.

SCIENCE

In the Upper School, all science courses are laboratory based, emphasizing concepts that are reinforced by experiences in the lab. Formal science writing and communication also builds each year. There are honors level courses in biology, chemistry, physics, and electives.

Physics 9 incorporates research-based approaches that emphasize collaboration, discussion, creativity, and problem solving. Engineering design and design thinking projects are integrated into the curriculum as students apply physics content to real-world problems.

In Grade 10, students study biology, progressing from evolution to physiology through ecology, molecular biology, biotechnology, and genetics. The course takes an inquiry approach to science learning, introducing students to the investigative nature of scientific research.

The Grade 11 chemistry course provides a comprehensive introduction to topics in chemistry with a strong focus on collaboration, including discussions, frequent lab work, demonstrations, and group problem solving.

Juniors and seniors may apply for the Advanced Science Research elective in which they design and implement their own research projects. Students then enter their research in local and national science competitions.

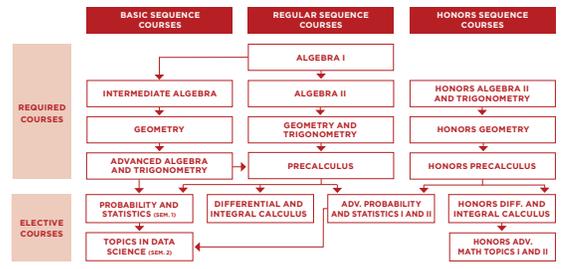
Students can select from a broad range of second-level and interdisciplinary science electives for their senior year.

◆ Honors biology and chemistry provide preparation for the AP exams in those content areas.

MATHEMATICS

Upper School math courses emphasize the nature of mathematical thought as well as the development of facility with the applications of mathematics; students gain a deep understanding of principles before applying them. Three course sequences offer each student the best fit in terms of pace, depth, and level of abstraction. Teachers assess progress to determine the best sequence for all students, and students may switch between sequences with departmental approval.

◆ Differential and Integral Calculus can be used as preparation for the AP Calculus AB Exam; Honors Differential and Integral Calculus can be used as preparation for the AP Calculus BC Exam; Adv Prob/Stats can be used as preparation for the AP Statistics Exam.



FINE ARTS

All students are required to take at least three semesters of fine arts, choosing among visual arts classes, musical ensembles, or theater courses. Ensembles include Summit Singers, Academy Choral, Academy Symphony, Honors Sinfonia, Intermediate and Advanced Jazz Ensembles, and Academy Winds, all of which produce two performances a year. More than half of the Upper School student body performs in the fall Pops Concert, which is a highlight of the year for students, faculty, and families. The Honors Music Seminar, for students in Grades 11 and 12, focuses on music analysis, composition, music history, and theory. Visual arts courses emphasize personal expression through drawing, painting, ceramics, photography, and video arts. In the Senior Art Seminar, the most advanced visual arts course, students pursue independent projects and build a portfolio for college applications. Theater courses focus on acting, directing, and design. Theater productions include a student-directed one act play series, a fall drama, and a spring musical.

FITNESS/ WELLNESS

The Grade 9 Fitness for Life course includes instruction in traditional sports, supervised training on fitness equipment, and certification in CPR. Grade 10 Wellness is taught by the Upper School counselor; this one-quarter class provides a supportive and reflective opportunity to explore and develop personal values, choices, and skills.

COMPUTER SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

The Upper School Computer Science curriculum is overseen by the Director of Computer Science and Engineering, a full-time faculty member in the Upper School Science Department. The curriculum includes Programming and Problem Solving, a project-based course that gives students a foundation in the basic skills of computational problem solving; Computer Science Principles I and II, which survey a broad range of computer science topics and introduces computational thinking; Advanced Programming I and II, which provide an in-depth study of object-oriented program design and development; Physical Computing, in which students create computational artifacts that interact with the physical world; Advanced Technology Projects; and Competition Robotics, in which students use basic programming skills and engineering problem-solving strategies to design and fabricate robots. Students who take this course are also members of the school's Robotics team, which competes in the nationwide First Technology Challenge.

TECHNOLOGY

At the start of their Upper School experience, families purchase a laptop to be used for research, organization, collaboration, and content production in all disciplines throughout the student's time in the Upper School. During "Technology Bootcamp," students in Grade 9 or new to SPA are introduced to devices, tools, and expectations. Topical lessons on technology use continue throughout Grade 9 and as needed for coursework throughout Upper School curriculum.

COMMUNITY

Within and beyond the classroom, the Upper School program helps students develop their unique voice within a close network of adult and student relationships. Each morning includes time in advisory groups with one adult and a small group of students. Student-led assemblies start and end most weeks. Students on *The Rubicon*, SPA's award-winning student newspaper, and the nationally-ranked debate team employ the verbal and written skills developed in the classrooms. A thriving program of student-led clubs, leadership, and interest groups create a strong sense of community; these groups include the Community Action and Service Club, Film Club, Art Club, PAWS, Science Team, Spartan Boosters, Intercultural Club, Student Political Union, Quiz Bowl, Students for Social Justice, Gender and Sexuality Acceptance, Spartan Beats, Math Team, and many others.

Capstone projects mark the senior year. Senior Speeches, written and delivered by each senior, are important community events affording each student the chance to share his or her own insights with peers, faculty, staff, and parents. At the end of the senior year, each student designs and implements a month-long Senior Project that combines a working internship with career exploration and service.