

On October 13, 2009, our Headmaster, Dr. Chermak, addressed the University Family Organization on the topic of University School's academic programs (The Academic U). The following is the text of his remarks:

I. Articulation

Our goal is for each student to have the benefit of a University School education from PK through grade 12. We have a unique opportunity, as an independent school, to work with students for 14 consecutive years. Our responsibility is to offer an academic program that is well-articulated – not only from grade to grade within each division, but between Lower School and Middle School and between Middle School and Upper School.

We have two curricular leadership positions and two extraordinary individuals to oversee articulation; positions you will not see in most schools. Dr. Liz Brennan, Associate Head for Academic Affairs, has academic oversight of PK-12. For those of you new to USchool, Dr. Brennan has been here since the 1970's, was Lower School Director for almost two decades and is also an adjunct professor of Graduate Studies in Education. This year we created a new position, Director of Special Academic Support Services to ensure articulation throughout the program for the LRA and learning resource programs in each division. I am proud to say that Melinda Ossorio, an experienced and talented educator serves in this position.

The Academic U is carefully articulated PK-grade 12 for maximum, cumulative learning. We accomplish this through the leadership of Dr. Brennan, Dr. Barnes, Dr. Blinder, Dr. Poland and Ms. Ossorio, curriculum mapping and continuing meetings and conversations at all levels.

II. Three Divisions – Three Stages of Academic Development

Lower School

A primary goal of Lower School is to nurture a love for learning and light the spark of excitement for discovery. This is not something measured on a standardized test, but it's critically important; this is what parents are talking about when they say that their children love coming to the University School each day. The program is interesting and challenging for children.

A second Lower School goal is to create an atmosphere conducive for students to develop self-discipline and take responsibility for their own learning at an early age. You won't see this in other schools – our young students know what they're doing and why – and they move seamlessly from one activity to the next.

A third Lower School defining feature is to apply basic skills and knowledge in creative projects. You will hear about examples today in the grade level reports. These projects stretch students' thinking, often have practical application, and may also engage the heart as well as the mind.

Middle School

In the Middle School years, the focus is to develop academic, research, organizational and study skills so that students can tackle advanced academic work. In essence, the goal is to provide each individual with the tools to successfully complete the academic program at our Upper School. Middle School students are very social and we find that group activities, carefully monitored, are very successful. The academic program is challenging, personalized and technologically advanced.

A second focus is to provide a curricular and extracurricular program rich in electives and choices so that students have an opportunity to begin to determine their strengths and what they enjoy.

Upper School

In the Upper School, students have an opportunity to build a college transcript that will distinguish them from other applicants and create many strong college options when they graduate. We have an incredibly broad program in academics, arts, athletics, activities and community service.

In the past two years we have expanded the academic program and built more collaboration with NSU. New opportunities include Advanced Topic courses like Independent Research Studies and Microbiology to supplement the comprehensive list of Advanced Placement or AP courses that have been offered in the past. We now have students enrolled in college courses at NSU, we have career exploration or capstone projects which pair juniors and seniors with professors on campus and practicing professionals in the field. And we have inaugurated our first group of researchers – juniors enrolled in the research methodology class, mentioned above, who will complete a two-year research project worthy of publication.

Summary:

By the time students have moved through the Lower, Middle and Upper School divisions they have developed a skill set that leads to success in college-

- they can work independently and budget their time wisely
- they have organizational skills
- they have a strong knowledge base
- they are technologically savvy and skilled
- they are accomplished in doing research and writing papers
- they are self-confident learners

In conclusion, here are my Top Ten Reasons for valuing the Academic U

- 1) a well-articulated program PK-12
- 2) teaching and learning based on activities that engage students' interests and deepen their thinking

- 3) programs that are tailored to each student's individual learning profile
- 4) a program model based on right-brained as well as left-brained activities to bring out the creativity in U
- 5) a comprehensive program of core, elective and extracurricular activities which help students build a solid foundation of knowledge and skills and find those areas in which they excel
- 6) an outstanding faculty who believe in the school's mission and go the extra mile for their students
- 7) an outstanding college counseling office which guides each student through the college admission process
- 8) the resources of a major university (NSU) accessible to students and integrated into the program
- 9) compassionate and experienced administrators who give overall direction to an outstanding program
- 10) a state-of-the-art, beautiful new campus and facilities to help the faculty, administration and staff bring out the best academic learning in U.

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