

Town Hall: Academics FAQ

Thanks for your interest in Seattle Academy! If you missed our recent Academics Town Hall, we have assembled questions and answers from the session that may be helpful to you. If you have additional questions, please email admissions@seattleacademy.org.

General Questions

Do you have examples of things teachers have done to provide a student with more challenge when they have a particular passion or need in an area?

This depends on the division, but for the most part, faculty will have options for students that include varying levels of challenge within the curriculum. In the Upper School, there are more options for students to take honors classes and work with faculty to develop independent study plans.

When you talk about project-based learning, how interdisciplinary is this beyond English and History?

Faculty will collaborate on projects in Math and Science, Art and Science, and Innovations. Faculty are encouraged and supported to think and design course material/lesson plans beyond their classroom and individual disciplines.

Acclimating into SAAS

For students applying to join the Upper School, what sort of adjustments have you seen given that they were not part of the SAAS Middle School curriculum? Is there any sort of onboarding program or framework?

Students new to SAAS are invited to participate in activities before the start of the new school year to give them an early introduction and lay of the land. The Upper School is new to our rising 8th grade class given their limited access to Upper School faculty and spaces. Additionally, a third of the 9th grade class is also new to SAAS.

With students coming from so many different schools, how does Seattle Academy address the acclimation process across subjects beginning in 6th or 9th grade?

Due to the large number of schools representing our incoming class of students, all students spend the early weeks of school revisiting learned material and/or determining gaps in learning to best gauge student ability. At this point, adjustments can be made to ensure that students are placed in classes offering the appropriate challenge level.

How do you integrate students that start in off years (7th, 8th, 10th, 11th)?

We know that students joining SAAS in off years may need additional support in acclimating academically to our program. Teachers and advisors intentionally work with students to determine gaps and support them in catching up with the material if needed.

Homework

What is the philosophy around homework for Middle School students? What's the typical homework load in Middle School?

In general, 6th graders do not have homework to complete outside of class time. If there is homework assigned, it usually takes no longer than one hour to complete. In 7th and 8th grade, the homework load will increase; however, as long as assignments and projects are being worked on in class when the time is allocated, homework should take between one to two hours to complete. Some of our current Middle School students shared that, "Most days are manageable, and you typically don't have homework every night."

Office Hours with Teachers

Are there teacher office hours to get in-person help on homework or concepts if they need extra support? How do you handle that?

Teachers will provide office hours in their syllabus. Also, teachers will also work with students if they need time outside of those hours.

Scheduling, Graduation Requirements

What is the day-to-day schedule at SAAS? How many courses are students enrolled in at one time?

Seattle Academy uses a block schedule, where four classes meet each day and alternate days. There are eight class blocks in each trimester, and each block is 75 minutes. Our most current daily schedule is always up to date on our [daily schedule page](#).

Are there specific classes (e.g., languages) that drop off if someone elects to take study skills?

For Middle School students enrolled in Study Skills, their World Language course would be substituted out. For Upper School students enrolled in Study Skills, the class meets during one of their elective blocks, and students can take a World Language if able. As with all electives, students receive an elective credit and a grade for this class, and students can take it for multiple trimesters.

Is SAAS on a semester or trimester schedule? Do teachers change throughout the year in the Upper School, for example?

SAAS is on a trimester schedule, and depending on the class, teachers change by trimester or can be a student's year-long teacher. For example, English is a year-long class, and students have the same English teacher for the school year. An arts or innovations elective that is only one trimester would mean they would have a different teacher the next trimester with a new elective and, therefore, a new teacher.

How do students see their grades during a trimester?

Grades are available to students and parents during the trimester in a school-based system called MyBackpack. At the end of each trimester, advisors meet with students to review and discuss their grades.

Arts

How are the arts electives integrated (or not integrated) into the school day? Are there designated periods for arts, do they fit into open blocks, or are they after the school day?

Arts classes are scheduled just as regularly as all other blocks. We're very proud of that--all classes have equal time in our schedule.

How has the school been teaching the arts electives during COVID over Zoom? Has it been successful?

Arts Faculty have worked on creative ways to take advantage of the new teaching environment while mitigating its challenges. Faculty prepared art kits for students that included materials that were either picked up or mailed out to students to allow full participation in art projects. Providing access to instruments, microphones, etc., for performing arts is always important, and in the remote setting, it was more challenging. Our faculty organized pick-ups of instruments for students that needed them - even drum sets!

The students meet over Zoom to work together and with the teacher. Additionally, specialist coaches in Middle School bands have been utilizing Zoom breakout rooms for detailed, small group, and specific technique instruction. Different digital applications have been explored and used. One, in particular, is "Upbeat," which allows students to record their playing. It uploads into a "room," and they can listen to themselves as part of the whole ensemble.

I heard a brief mention of a string ensemble. Can you say more about instrumental music options for students who come in with experience playing an instrument like the violin?

String Ensemble can be one trimester or year-long course for intermediate to advanced level string players and includes violin, viola, cello, and bass. This course is open to grades 9-12 and by audition. The focus is mainly on playing classical chamber music and learning the skills to be a good ensemble player. The repertoire chosen will address the group's skill level to develop a

cohesive group sound and produce an accomplished end of trimester presentation. Students will explore and learn chamber music skills such as verbal and non-verbal communication, ensemble techniques, musical expression, sight-reading, and performance skills in this course.

Health / Physical Education (PE)

Is Health the same as PE?

Health is not the same as PE. Students in 6th through 9th grades must take a trimester long Health course focused on social, emotional, and physical health. Upper School health classes will dive into a more in-depth curriculum surrounding anatomy, social wellness, identity, and relationships. PE classes focus on physical movement.

Math

Question about math trajectories: Is there a minimum competency that's true for all trajectories, or are these entirely bespoke to students' pace?

As Middle School begins, students hone number-sense skills, develop flexibility with concrete operations, and an understanding of variables. Continuing through our Middle School program, students master key concepts from algebra and geometry.

Upper School students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. As nearly all of our students take four years of mathematics or even choose to enroll in extra mathematics courses, we offer Calculus 1 and 2 and a series of topics that explore the applications of mathematics. Advanced math and elective courses are available to students once they have met core math requirements.

Students are expected to learn and achieve success in the current math trajectory, with or without support.

Our child plans to take the SSAT for another school. Will that help with placement for SAAS despite SAAS not requiring the placement test this year?

Yes, you are welcome to submit the test scores when available or later in the process, which may be helpful for class placement. Entrance exam testing is not required this year so this step is totally at your discretion.

English

Can you talk about how long writing assignments are handled? Are they handwritten or typed, and are students allowed to submit and then revise work based on feedback?

The process will vary depending upon Middle School or Upper School division and class level. In general, the English curriculum is designed to prepare students through the practice of core communication skills: reading, writing, researching, presenting, listening, and critical thinking. Students are supported to deliver their work through various avenues and are encouraged to prepare drafts and revisions of work, in collaboration with their teachers, to deliver their best work.

World Language

If entering as a 7th grader, how is Latin handled if they have no previous experience?

Typically, the Latin teacher will reach out to Admissions to gather a list and contact information for new 7th-grade students to reach out in late spring to offer resources and suggested reading materials to catch up with peers.

Honors Classes

Are there examples of differences between honors and non-honors courses?

Honors courses will have an accelerated and more challenging workload. They are designed to push students to their full ability appropriately. Students may see additional assignments, more research-oriented projects, and more opportunities for independent work with honors courses.

Are students encouraged/prepared to take Advanced Placement (AP) exams?

SAAS does not offer AP courses. We do support students who may have an interest in taking the exams individually.

Electives

The electives sound great. How many elective slots do Middle School students have?

Middle School students rotate between three electives throughout the year. They also have the option to take a year-long instrumental music elective.

Senior Projects

What are some internships students do? Can you do an internship anywhere, or are there parameters?

The internship that all of our students complete are the Senior Projects. The main requirement for Senior Projects is that students work 25-30 hours per week during the last 5 weeks of their final trimester, their senior year. We've listed out a few of the kinds of organizations and companies that students have interned for in the past, for example start up businesses, at an elementary school, with local musicians, in the food industry, at architectural firms, for local theatres like 5th Ave, with the Seattle Storm, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), food

banks, software development, or in government and law, for example, a student worked with a city council member.

Senior Project opportunities are practically limitless in what a student can do. Our intentions for Senior Projects is to support our students in their career exploration and to help them as they are starting to prepare for the professional field that they might have interest in and create the opportunity to explore that field.

College Advising

What are the college application services that you offer?

There are several College Advising services offered with a complete list available on [our website](#).

The primary services offered are:

- *individual college advisor assignments*
- *access to over 150 college representatives annually*
- *test prep/plan services*
- *essay writing support*
- *college interviewing strategies and techniques*

What is your college admissions rate?

Typically, 100% of SAAS students gain admissions to college.

Class Size

How large are your Middle School classes?

There are 390 students in the Middle School, which are evenly distributed across grades. We continue to maintain smaller classroom sizes of 18-20 students.

Outdoor, Trips, & Travel

Can you share how SAAS interfaces with the great outdoors? How do you take middle and high school students out? Ski bus? Camping trips? Trekking? Biking? Kayaking?

All of the above! Our [Outdoor & Travel Program](#) seeks to provide opportunities for students to deepen relationships with other members of the community and develop a responsible understanding of the cultures, people, and lands through which they travel. Our trip program incorporates outdoor/wilderness travel, cultural immersion, language immersion, and service. In prior years, we have offered a 7th and 8th grade two-week trip to the Yukon over the summer. In the Upper School, we have offered trips to China, Costa Rica, New Orleans, and Zambia. We do offer a Ski Bus hosted and coordinated through our Parent Association.