



April 2, 2024

Dear Upper School Parents and Caregivers,

This communication aims to overview the **Course Request Process for the 2024-2025 school year**. Your daughter's advisor will guide her in designing her academic program and actively include you in the discernment process. If you would find a preview of the process and its design principles helpful, please read on!

Timeline

Current 9th, 10th, and 11th grade students engage in the Course Request Process between March 26 and April 19.

- During the week of March 25, each student learns about the [course offerings](#) and begins conversing with her advisor about her academic hopes and interests.
- Each academic department indicates to a student's advisor which courses represent the best match for the student based on her current demonstration of skills and knowledge mastery. These recommendations represent where the department thinks the student will achieve long-term success based on: conversations with current teachers, data on how the student has performed on mastery assessments both broadly and regarding specific skill areas of importance, and academic skills ratings that speak to the student's development of essential habits of mind.
- In early April, advisors reach out to schedule a conference where each student, parent/caregiver, and advisor will collaborate to design an academic program that facilitates appropriate challenge, balance, and engagement.
- Course Request decisions are due to advisors by April 19. Students traveling on a Sacred Heart Exchange can request accommodations to this timeline as needed.

Design Principles

What does success look like in the Course Request Process? The short answer is a sense of overall balance in interest level, workload, time commitment, and rigor. As the process unfolds, a student will engage in formative conversations with her advisor, teachers, and parents/caregivers to understand what will constitute a balanced schedule.

The following principles signify a well-designed course program:

- The proposed schedule reflects the student's interests and passions. It resonates with who she is, her sense of purpose, what she cares about, and any future goals she may have identified.
- The student seeks to challenge herself in areas of strength and interest. A challenge may include trying something new, moving from the standard to the honors or advanced placement level in an academic discipline, or auditioning for an advanced Arts program.

- The student demonstrates long-term commitments across the curriculum in accordance with graduation requirements.
- There is an overall balance, the details of which will vary for each student. Given her current abilities, there are enough hours in the day for her to engage confidently in her studies, participate in extracurricular activities, enjoy meaningful time with friends and family, and attain adequate rest.

Course Level Terminology

Students and parents frequently ask for help understanding the nuances between standard, honors, and advanced placement courses and the implications of one choice over another in long-term course planning. We root these decisions in student readiness and time for added challenge and create multiple pathways to advanced study to allow students to advance when they are ready.

- Standard-level courses *explicitly teach* and deepen critical foundational skills in analytical reading, writing, problem-solving, and learning. These are rigorous college-preparatory courses that prepare students to advance to the next level in the discipline.
- Honors and advanced placement courses move faster, expect a deeper level of analysis and more independent study, and *assume* specific foundational skills in analytical reading, writing, problem-solving, and learning. Students well-matched for these courses have demonstrated mastery of foundational skills, intellectual curiosity for the course material, and essential habits of mind.
- Mindful that each student is on a unique and personalized learning journey, course offerings create multiple pathways to advanced study. Choosing the standard level one year does not close the door to advanced study the following year; in fact, discerning that the standard level is the right place for one year may be a crucial step in preparing for the honors or advanced placement level in the following year.

Additional Insight

Advisors may also engage department chairs, the College Guidance office, and Academic Support team members to help discern a student's best course option. Students participate in these conversations and benefit from the nuanced perspectives they can provide.

Rooted in the Goals of Sacred Heart Schools, we hope the Course Request Process will empower your daughter to contemplate her unique sense of purpose, participate in formative conversations, pursue deep learning, and strive for holistic balance.

I am available and happy to join the conversation if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,
Melissa Bleakney-Dalton
Head of Upper School