



Upper School Curriculum Guide 2025 - 2026

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Upper School Philosophy

Our Upper School program ensures that students will not only be admitted to colleges that best suit them, but also that they have the skills and confidence to thrive once they get there. The path to this destination varies for everyone; therefore, we offer myriad opportunities to delve deeply into subjects supported by a broad-based foundation in the liberal arts. Surrounded by a caring community of faculty and peers, students feel safe—socially, emotionally, and physically—and consequently, take the measured risks necessary to support high academic achievement, develop passion, and build character.

The Upper School curriculum is designed to be an engaging experience that intentionally integrates many of the same demands and opportunities that students will find in college. Upper School students take core academic classes and meet athletic requirements, but also have several opportunities to direct their own education through courses of their choosing, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses and focused learning during Intraterm and Senior Projects. After freshman year in college, many of our alumni report that the classes and skills taught, as well as the workload at VMS, prepared them well, allowing them to excel academically and inspiring them to take advantage of the co-curricular opportunities that abound in college.

The heart of our Upper School is an inspired faculty representing an extraordinary breadth of experience and interests that they share willingly with students. Teachers create an environment in which students are excited to show up early, happy to stay late, and eager to participate in class. Rapport drives classroom discussions in which teachers and students push each other to take learning further. The common thread among our entire faculty is a profound commitment to each child and relentless optimism in their potential.

The result: a quiet confidence that serves our graduates well in college and beyond. This confidence allows them to assert themselves in their first college level essays, to raise their hand in a class of hundreds, to live on their own for the first time, to meet with and question their professors, and to lead among their peers—traits that will also serve them well in life.

This guide articulates the Upper School courses offered at VMS, which are used as the primary vehicles for college preparation.

New This Year

English

The English Department will be providing an exciting new experience for our seniors next year by providing them with a unique opportunity to explore Rivers & Literature, including a four-day river trip aligned with our place in the desert Southwest as well as a journey through creative expression and research projects.

History

The History Department will offer AP U.S. History for 10th graders. Please see the requirements and prerequisites found in the course description. In keeping with the History Department's philosophy of building skills and knowledge in the first two years of upper school to allow students to delve deeply into content specific courses in 11th and 12th grade, new courses will be offered in 2025-2026. Course offered first semester: Sociology of Punishment in the United States, Border Studies, Vietnam: A Cultural and Political Legacy. Second semester, 12th grade will exchange history and English for their Senior Project and Humanities Capstone Class.

Science

The Science Department will rotate several courses offering AP Physics C: Mechanics this year while AP Chemistry will be offered next in 2026-2027. Also, Environmental Chemistry will now be offered every year (replacing Advanced Chemistry) giving students the opportunity to explore how matter on earth shapes environmental systems. This course will connect rigorous content to current environmental challenges facing the air, water, soil, and energy resources while also exploring future solutions.

Technology

The Technology Department will offer two courses this year. The first is Design, Engineering, and Coding. This is a hands-on, semester-long course that invites students to design, build, and program a variety of creative projects that incorporate design, engineering, and programming.

The second course is 3D Modeling and Animation. This is a creative, semester-long, non-programming course where students will learn how to model 3D objects and characters as well as how to animate them to create Pixar-style creations.

Visual Arts

The Visual Arts Department has developed a course continuum that allows students to specialize in ceramics and photography or explore in-depth mediums such as fiber arts and sculpture. For those considering studying art beyond Upper School, the department offers an Advanced Portfolio Development course for 11th or 12th graders, followed by the option to take AP Studio Art in 12th grade.

World Languages

The World Languages Department has created a new course, Advanced Spanish through Service Learning, open to 11th and 12th grade students. This immersive course combines language acquisition with community engagement, in line with our school philosophy of experiential learning. Students will apply their Spanish skills through mentoring, translating, tutoring, and organizing cultural events in local Spanish-speaking communities.. Experiences are documented through journals, presentations, and collaborative projects, enhancing fluency and cultural understanding.

Vail Mountain School is pleased to offer the **Seal of Biliteracy**, a credential recognizing students who achieve proficiency in two or more languages by graduation. This seal is awarded to those who meet the standards, providing a diploma endorsement in biliteracy for students proficient in English and at least one additional language. Earning the Seal of Biliteracy not only strengthens students' language abilities but can also open doors to college credit, scholarships, study abroad programs, and expanded career opportunities.

Changes to Grade Point Average Calculation

In 2024-2025 all Advanced Placement classes started to be calculated into weighted Grade Point Average scores with a +1.0 for the grade earned. This change was the result of a thorough study of peer school, colleges' and universities' admission practices, and AI influence in assessing students' application for college admission.

In 2025-2026, Vail Mountain School will further apply that same +1.0 addition to Grade Point Average calculations to all classes that are considered advanced or accelerated, including: *Advanced Precalculus*, and *Accelerated Bio/ Chemistry*. Students who enroll in a new course, *Advanced Spanish through Service Learning* will also receive an increased GPA calculation. Seniors who receive an *Honors Designation in their Senior Project*, awarded in May, will also receive a +1.0 to the GPA.

This change to the Grade Point Average calculator will only enhance future as well as relevant past GPAs. No student will see a decline in their GPA.

For rising 10th-12th graders who have taken Advanced and AP Course in the past at Vail Mountain School, VMS will retroactively change their GPAs after the conclusion of the 2024-2025 school year. The rising 12th graders will see the changes first as they work to build their college list and as they prepare for application season this summer/fall. Future communications will address the changes as we work grade level by grade level.

Upper School Overview

Ninth Grade

In 9th grade, VMS students experience more independence as they begin, in earnest, to prepare for college. It is also during this year that students' official academic transcripts begin to take shape. Through discussion-based courses, students learn the value of asking good questions and supporting their opinions.

Tenth Grade

Students in 10th grade continue the Upper School progression of college preparation. Along with five core academic courses, students take another step in getting to know themselves as learners by meeting the challenges of accelerated curriculums. During sophomore year, they have the opportunity to sign up for advanced classes as well as travel to Front Range colleges with their class and College Counselor.

Eleventh Grade

By 11th grade, VMS students are well prepared to apply themselves as students, athletes, and community leaders. The year may include further Advanced Placement courses and exams, an in-depth look at and engagement in the college search process, and preparation for taking college entrance exams. Building on their leadership skills, 11th graders take active roles in Clubs, Student Life, and leading community events.

Twelfth Grade

Senior year marks the final steps that students take before they move on to a post-secondary setting. In the fall, students work with their college counselor to apply to colleges and universities across the nation and around the world. Seniors take on myriad leadership roles within the school to strengthen the VMS community. All seniors will pursue a capstone Senior Project during their last semester. As a final gesture of growth and independence, the seniors conduct their own graduation ceremony to which the entire school community is invited.

Graduation Requirements

- Admission to a four-year college
- Participation in interscholastic sports
- Completion of four years of English, history, science, and mathematics
- Completion of three consecutive years of a world language, starting in 9th grade
- Completion of four years of Intraterm
- Completion of annual Visual and/or Performing Arts requirements
- Completion of a Senior Project during the second semester of senior year
- Completion of any additional departmental requirements

Course Load

All courses at Vail Mountain School are college preparatory and require a substantial commitment of time in and out of the classroom. In addition to art classes, students take five core academic courses for four years. Students receive instruction for 400 minutes per academic course on a rotating, ten-day schedule with an average of two hours of homework each evening.

Additional requirements include participation in interscholastic sports and fitness programs. Technology and Performing and Visual Arts electives are offered at least two times per week, each semester, to provide students with additional enrichment. Community service is a central component of the curriculum, and nearly 100% of our students volunteer.

VMS's college preparatory program allows students to take up to three Advanced Placement courses in a year with careful advisement in 11th and 12th grades. VMS defines a course load of two to three Advanced Placement courses per year as "most demanding." Students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses are required to complete and submit an application or writing sample, engage in and complete summer work, and take the corresponding Advanced Placement exam(s) in May.

Course Selection & the College Search Process

Vail Mountain School offers a rigorous college preparatory program in the Upper School. While few students will know their career and college plans in 9th grade, it is essential to know that colleges value greatly the course of study one takes at VMS as part of a student's academic profile reflected on the transcript. Colleges receive the VMS College Profile, essential to contextualizing the transcript, to illustrate the breadth and depth of our curriculum, the mean and median grade point average, and ACT/SAT score as well as the Portrait of a VMS Graduate. To build a strong foundation in 9th grade, students do not have flexibility with course selection. Beginning in 10th grade, and then later in 11th and 12th grades, students have more opportunities to make informed decisions regarding their academic program. When making decisions, students should keep in mind their academic interests and strengths, potential major areas, and the degree of competitiveness they are likely to encounter in the college application process. Students are encouraged to take as strong an academic program as is appropriate and healthy for their current capabilities, taking into consideration course recommendations from teachers and department chairs, and one that is in line with their current interests and future aspirations. Students should work with their Homebase advisor and/or college counselors for individualized guidance.

Adding/Dropping Courses

All adds, drops, or changes in courses must be made through the Upper School Division Director and the Department Chair using the Drop/Add Form.

Students may not add a new course to their program after three weeks into the semester (approximately 15 school days). Students may not drop a year-long course after the first three weeks of the term. (See below for withdrawal policy.)

If a student's course placement, as determined by the department, is subsequently deemed by the Department Chair and the Upper School Division Director to need adjustment, a student's course assignment can be changed by the Upper School Division Director.

All changes in a course of study for 12th grade students will be reported to the colleges to which that student has applied or has been accepted.

Withdrawing from a Course

Any student who drops a course after the Drop/Add deadline will receive a "W" on their transcript, noting their withdrawal from the course. VMS will rely on the student and the College Counselor to explain why the student withdrew from the course during their college

application process. Extenuating circumstances for changes to late courses (illness, family emergency, etc.) will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by the Upper School Division Director and the College Counselors.

The “W” will most often be used within the first six to seven weeks of a semester. After that point, the only changes that can be made to a student’s course load is at the change in semester. We strongly advise that any student who is making a significant change to their courses after the drop/ add period consult with College Counseling.

Examinations

In most instances, students will take examinations in their major subjects at the end of each semester. The schedule for examinations will be posted in advance. Except under the most unusual circumstances, students must meet the published examination schedule.

Grade Point Average

Vail Mountain School uses a four point grading scale and does not rank its students. Courses in art, music, and technology are graded and included in the grade point average. Intraterm, Ethics and fitness/ PE requirements are graded either pass or fail. The following grading scale is used for coursework as well as calculating grade point average at the end of each academic year:

A.....93-100.....4.00	C.....73-76.....2.00
A-.....90-92.....3.67	C-.....70-72.....1.67
B+.....87-89.....3.33	D+.....67-69.....1.33
B.....83-86.....3.00	D.....65-66.....1.00
B-.....80-82.....2.67	F.....below 65
C+.....77-79.....2.33	

Advanced Placement Courses

Advanced Placement (AP) courses are weighted 1.0 point more in the Grade Point Average calculations. Students will see the additional 1.0 reflected in the “weighted grade point average” only, and an unweighted average will be present on the student’s transcript as well. While each core subject in our curriculum is rigorous, AP classes demand extra coursework and assignments which consequently will receive more weight in the grade point average.

To be admitted into an AP class at VMS, students must earn an A- or higher for the year in their current course and have their current teacher’s approval and the approval of the Department Chair (see individual class/department requirements for clarity). Students must also complete the appropriate AP course application. Certain departments may have additional requirements including, but not limited to, a summer assignment or a written component as part of the application process.

Students who take an AP course are required to take the AP exam in the spring. Our AP courses meet the criteria of the College Board. It’s at the discretion of colleges to award college credit for AP exam scores of 4 or 5, and for some, a 3.

Vail Mountain School’s philosophy for Advanced Placement courses is to ensure that students are learning the College Board curriculum with fidelity so they can perform well on an AP exam. Instructors may enhance the given curriculum with research, experiential learning, project-based learning and advanced topics.

Academic Calendar

Vail Mountain School operates on a semester system. Grades are issued at the conclusion of each term (late December and late May). First semester grades are considered “mid-year” grades for college admission purposes. Only year-end final grades appear on the student’s transcripts, at which point a grade point average is calculated.

Grades and Report Cards

Report cards are posted on the Veracross Parent and Student Portals. Progress reports at the end of the first and third quarters contain a grade with a narrative comment and indicate whether or not a student’s performance and effort are satisfactory. Report cards for the first and second semesters will include letter grades (A–F) earned in all major subjects, reflecting the teacher’s evaluation of the student’s written and oral work throughout the semester and their work on the semester examination, if one is given. Narrative student comments are written for every student at the end of the first and third quarters and discussed at conferences. Year-end final grades as well as year-end GPA are recorded on the transcript.

Transcript Requests

Official Transcript - Official transcript requests must be made one week in advance and in writing. A Vail Mountain School official transcript represents a record of work completed at the school. Only full and complete transcripts will be issued. Official transcripts will not be given to the student or parent, but sent directly to the receiving institution. Official transcripts will be issued only when accounts are paid in full.

Unofficial Transcript - Unofficial transcripts are available by calling or emailing the VMS Registrar.

Honor System

A student should make every effort to get assistance from teachers rather than giving in to dishonesty when feeling overwhelmed. Likewise, submitting assignments written by artificial intelligence and without citation is considered dishonest. Plagiarism and similar behaviors have no place in a college preparatory program or in a school where trust is meant to set the standard. Students are asked to uphold the following honor statement with each examination they submit: *“I pledge to conduct myself in a trustworthy manner with compassion and integrity. All work I complete will be my own, and I will give credit where it is due. I will hold myself accountable and will accept any consequences for my actions. I will not condone any breach of the Honor Code, and I will help my peers to develop a greater sense of moral integrity and academic honesty. I will strive to represent the VMS community as a respectful, responsible, and caring individual both inside and outside of school.”* The Honor Code applies to homework, research, laboratory experiments, essays, quizzes, exams, and all other items that are turned in as the work of an individual student. A breach of honor may result in referral to the honor council.

Academic Probationary Status

Four specific steps constitute the probation process at Vail Mountain School: Mandatory Student Support, Academic Probation, Academic Restriction, and Advise to Withdraw. The steps are structured to respond to increasingly serious academic difficulties. Any student who receives a grade below C- on a semester transcript in one core academic class will be placed on Mandatory Student Support. If a student receives two C-’s or below, he or she will be placed on Academic Probation. Mandatory Student Support as well as Academic Probation initiate a process that aims

to identify problems and offer solutions. Interventions may include but are not limited to the following: loss of free periods, after-school study sessions, peer tutoring, and Student Support Services designated sessions. If a student continues to receive grades of C- or below on semester report cards, they will advance through VMS's probation process. Academic restriction limits students' choice during the day by assigning study time to Student Support Services. If a student continues to earn failing grades, they will be advised to withdraw from Vail Mountain School.

Student Support Services

The VMS community embraces individual ways of learning and is committed to supporting students in an inclusive classroom with additional support. The professionals in Student Support Services collaborate with students, parents, and faculty members to create student-centered learning plans designed to increase student opportunities to show mastery of content through multiple means.

When it has been determined that a student can benefit from academic accommodations such as extended time, visual aids, or targeted instructional practices, Student Support Services works with teachers to implement these plans. Additionally, this department provides remediation and teaches study skills, test-taking skills and executive functioning skills for students K-12. This intervention can take the form of co-teaching in the general classroom, meeting individually or in small groups with students, or mentoring students after school.

VMS employs professionals in Student Support Services who hold graduate degrees and/or have formal training and expertise working with students who learn differently. Additionally, the department collaborates with a clinical psychologist and school counselor who provide consultation, short-term counseling, crisis triage services, and primary prevention programming for the K-12 student and parent community.

College Counseling

VMS devotes significant time, effort, and resources to help each student find a good, heartfelt fit in college. College counseling begins in 9th grade when students are introduced to the significance of their academic record and look at the "big picture" of what lies ahead during the next four years.

In 10th grade, the discussion focuses on exploring options and looking at all the variables in the college search process. Students also have the opportunity to travel and compare a variety of schools—public vs. private, urban vs. rural, big vs. small, research vs. liberal arts—in order to gain a sense of what life is like on the different campuses. In addition, students are encouraged to hone skills and further develop personal interests in and out of school. Students inventory their skills and strengths to help them identify appropriate paths in the college search.

Students in 11th grade, in formal weekly meetings, look inward in order to understand themselves and their goals. College counseling discussions focus on balanced list building, interviewing, taking standardized tests, creating resumes, writing personal essays, and demonstrating leadership, in order to convey an authentic picture of themselves. Working one-on-one with the college counselor, juniors establish their college list and learn strategies for effectively and efficiently researching colleges in order to later focus their search. In addition, students and parents gain access to SCOIR, a web-based college counseling resource, and learn how to utilize its many tools that assist with the college search and college application submission. In the spring, 11th grade students attend a writing retreat where they develop their voice to serve them well in storytelling

and reflecting when writing essays and completing supplements. Juniors also participate in the Common Application Bootcamp before the start of senior year.

During senior year, students finalize their college search and apply to their final list of colleges. The result is young adults with a number of options from which to choose, who are comfortable, confident, and prepared to excel in college.

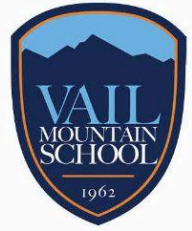
Department Chairs

- **Performing Arts:** Christi Howell
- **Visual Arts:** Phoebe Brookes
- **English:** Laurie Mortensen
- **History:** Noel Falk
- **Mathematics:** Tanya Boderck
- **Science:** Ross Sappenfield
- **World Languages:** Angela Alonso
- **Student Support Services:** Shannon Peterson
- **College Counselor:** Marisa Ferrara
- **Director of Upper School:** Maggie Pavlik

Arts & Technology

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression

9th Grade



1st Semester

Theatre Appreciation

Visual Arts:
Foundation Studio

Computer Science

2nd Semester

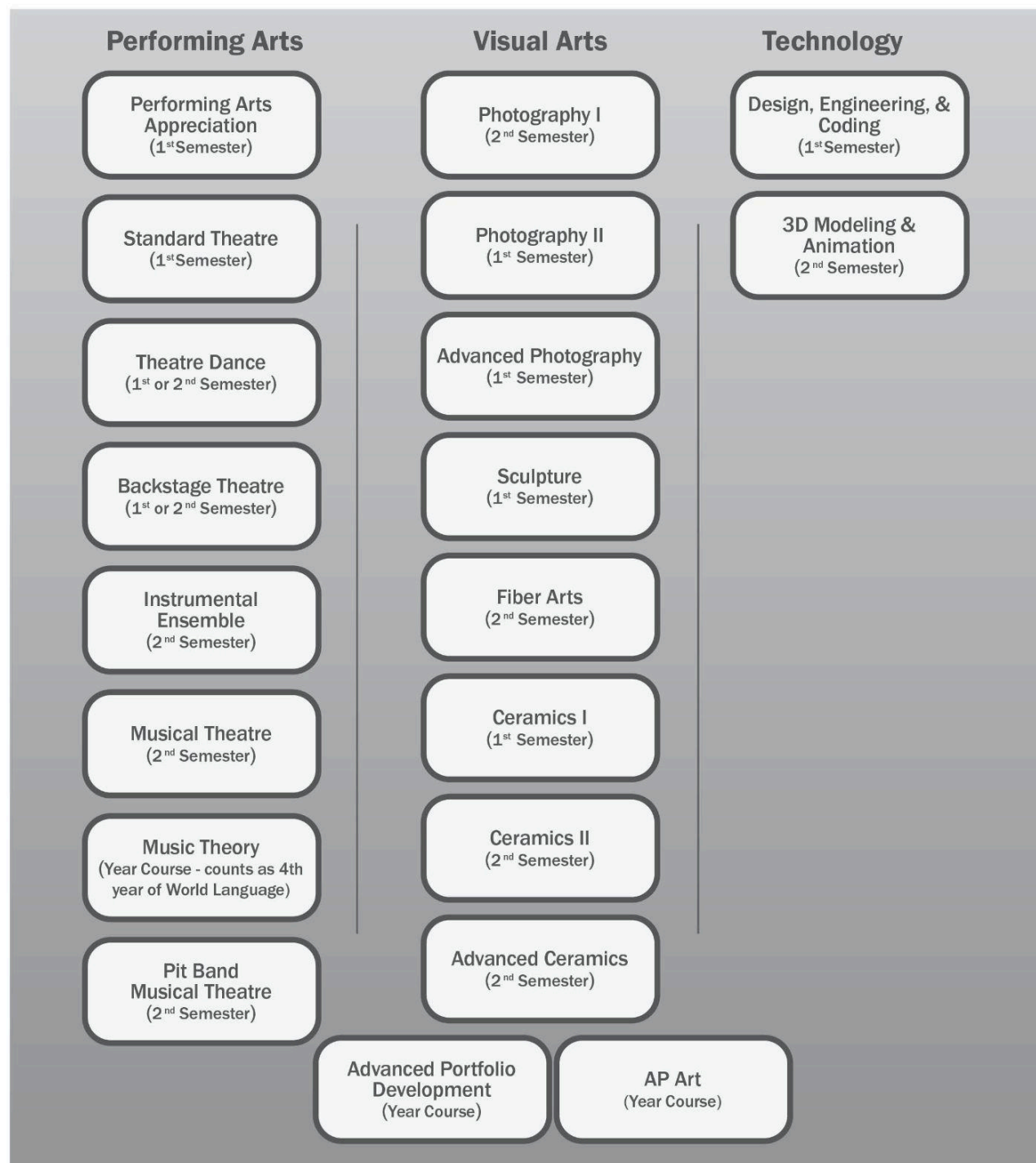
Visual Arts:
Foundation Studio

Computer Science

Musical Theatre

Arts & Technology 10th-12th Grades

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression



Arts & Technology

Students may choose from a range of Visual, Performing Arts, and Technology classes. These courses range from one semester to a full year in length, and students are required to complete one semester of coursework each academic year. Students in 9th grade are required to take two semesters of the Arts, as part of our Art Foundation program. This requirement is designed to nurture the students' creative thinking in order to complement their academic coursework.

Technology courses work on a three-year rotating schedule inclusive of AP Computer Science A, two one-semester courses inclusive of game programming and app programming or 3D modeling, and Computer Science Principles. This year, computer science elective courses will be offered to students in grades 10-12.

Performing Arts

At the Upper School level, the performing arts program is designed to allow students with interests in music or drama to further develop their skills through both exploratory and performance-based courses. Upper School music performance will include Instrumental Ensemble, Theatre, and a Performing Arts Appreciation. All students entering 10th grade are required to complete one semester of performing arts during their time at VMS.

The goal of theatre performance programs is to educate and expose the students to a broad range of theatrical styles by presenting diverse performances and productions for cultural enhancement. The Performing Arts Department also strives to prepare students for post-high school study in music, theory, and performance.

Music Theory – year course

Open to: 11th & 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 90 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

Music Theory is offered to a junior or senior student who would like to further their interest in music theory. The music theory course supports mastery of the rudiments and vocabulary of music including aural skills and composition. Topics will include but are not limited to: pitch and rhythmic notation, meter, scales, intervals, triads and seventh chord, cadences, non-harmonic tones, melody, texture, voice leading, modulations, small forms, and score analysis. Building on this foundation, the course will progress to include more complex and creative tasks such as: melodic and harmonic dictation, composition, implying appropriate harmony, realization of the Roman numeral progression, and analysis of melody and harmony. The curriculum will focus predominantly on repertoire from the Western canon, but will also include jazz compositions, 20th century works, and world music. Students who take this course will have the option to take the AP Music Theory exam in May. Students will need to sign up for the exam in the fall of 2025 and will be required to attend out of school testing prep prior to the exam.

9th Grade Theatre Appreciation – 1st semester course

Open to: 9th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This course is designed for 9th grade students who are interested in the theatre world and would like to learn more about the history, craft, and execution of the art form. This course will go into the rich backstory of theatre and study its importance in cultures around the world. This will not be a performance-based course, but will have aspects that require working on stage in front of the class, as well as papers, script/film analysis, and standard tests and quizzes.

Standard Theatre Performance – 1st semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade; Class is limited to 25 students

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

In this course, students will explore basic acting skills through the production of a standard play. Students learn the rehearsal process and the performance/staging process of the selected production piece. An audition is required as part of the course and will constitute a major part of the grade. No other students are present during the audition. The three final performances in November are a requirement for all students who take the course. There will be small-group after-school rehearsals as needed, whereby the rehearsals will be planned around other school activities to give all students an opportunity to participate. There will be full cast rehearsals on selected Sundays. The student must be available the Sunday through Saturday of the production week. All students will need to sign a contract confirming their commitment to the Theatre program; class time is rehearsal time and may not be missed except for events previously posted on the VMS master calendar.

Musical Theatre Performance – 2nd semester course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

In this course, students will explore basic musical theatre acting skills through the production of a musical. The students learn the rehearsal process and the performance/staging process of the selected production piece. Prior singing and dancing experience is not necessary but will be required in the course to some extent. An audition is required as part of the course and will constitute a major part of the grade. No other students are present during the audition. Students can choose to audition for non-singing or non-dancing roles. The three final musical performances in April are a requirement for all students who take the course. There will be small-group after-school rehearsals as needed and these rehearsals will be planned around other school activities to give all students an opportunity to participate. There will be full-cast rehearsals on selected Sundays, and before- and after-school rehearsals may be required. Students must be available the Sunday through Saturday of the production week. All students will need to sign a contract confirming their commitment to the Theatre program; class time is rehearsal time and may not be missed except for events previously posted on the VMS master calendar. Students in 9th grade are encouraged to audition for this class, though one must have all A's and B's in the first semester to qualify for the second semester musical.

Pit Band Musical Theatre – 2nd semester course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Prior playing experience

This class is intended for students seeking to deepen their musical understanding and enhance their skills through instrument performance. Throughout the course, students will focus on developing their technical proficiency and musical expression on their chosen instrument. As a culmination of this development, students will perform the score to the Upper School Spring Musical. The Ensemble will accompany the Upper School Spring Musical, which will require extra rehearsals during tech week. Because this class is primarily learning and practicing the score of the musical, students will learn and practice independently and will meet during the Arts Block Monday and Fridays 11:35 - 1:15 pm.

Performing Arts Appreciation – 1st semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 90 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

Performing Arts Appreciation will further one's knowledge and understanding of the universal and timeless qualities that identify all performing arts. The more one appreciates and understands, the better one can develop, evaluate, and improve a cultural mindset. During this course, students will learn about musical instruments and the different genres, artists, and composers. Students will also have an introduction to music theory, learn to read and write music, and analyze and listen to melodies. Students will also be able to compose original songs and arrange songs that are known and loved. This is a course full of music and fun while gaining a true appreciation for the performing arts.

Instrumental Ensemble – 2nd semester course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 90 minute periods

Prerequisites: Prior playing experience

This class is designed for students who would like to explore and expand their previous musical knowledge through playing their instrument in an ensemble. Through this course, students will build instrumental technique through sight reading, chamber music, and ensemble work. Students will work to develop these skills and learn pieces of music to be performed throughout the year.

Theatre Dance – one semester course (offered 1st and 2nd semester)

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Audition required

This course is intended for students who are interested in learning how to choreograph for Theatre. This is not a technique class, and an audition will be required to join the class. Students in this class will transition into the Musical Theatre track during the spring semester and will serve as the dance lead for the spring show as well as be expected to choreograph select songs for both the MS and US musicals. There will be small-group after-school rehearsals as needed, and these rehearsals will be planned around other school activities to give all students an opportunity to participate. There will be full-cast rehearsals on selected Sundays. The students must be available Sunday through Saturday the week of the production. All students will need to sign a contract

confirming their commitment to the Theatre program; class time is rehearsal time and may not be missed except for events previously posted on the VMS All School Calendar.

Backstage Theatre – one semester course (offered 1st and 2nd semester)

Open to: 10th - 12th grade; class limit 5 max

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Interview with Theatre Director

This course is meant for those who have had experience backstage or in Theatre technology and would like to pursue a more in-depth and hands-on experience. Students in this course will help produce, construct, run, and design parts of the Upper School productions. Therefore, there are certain after-school and weekend dates that students in this course will be required to attend, which will be discussed at the beginning of the course. Admission to this course requires students to have an informal interview with the Theatre Director regarding their interests and experience in Theatre.

Visual Arts

In Upper School, students may take a variety of visual arts courses designed to enhance their skills and hone their talents in the areas of sculpture and fiber arts to ceramics and photography. Students will take a sequence of classes to further develop skills and techniques introduced in 9th Grade Foundations to meet the Visual Arts requirements. Upper School classes combine studio work with theory, aesthetics, criticism, and understanding of the arts. Introductory level courses cover concepts and carry out particular tasks pertaining to the elements and principles of design; they also help master techniques involved with a particular medium. As students progress to higher level classes, they use prior knowledge of concepts and techniques to broaden their creative abilities, artistic voice and unique styles of work. For Upper School students who seek more intensive studies, there are three further Visual Arts options available: Senior Projects, Advanced Portfolio Development, and the College Board Advanced Placement course.

Visual Arts: Foundation Studio – one semester course (offered 1st and 2nd semester)

Open to: 9th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This course provides 9th grade students with a foundation in studio art. Students are introduced to the elements and principles of design whilst experimenting with a variety of materials. Throughout the semester, the class will explore numerous mediums including, but not limited to: drawing, painting, sculpture, assemblage, printmaking, and digital art. Students will explore their individual creativity as well as how to create collaboratively with other student artists. Students will be asked to empathize with others, push themselves outside their comfort zones and grow from the unexpected. The elements and principles of design are a vital component of the course. By balancing the study of art history, studio practice, and art criticism, students develop various approaches to art-making and gain insight into the ever-changing world of art.

Photography I – 2nd semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

In Photography I, students will explore the technical and creative aspects of digital photography using DSLR cameras and phone cameras. Exploring various types of composition guidelines such as the rule of thirds, leading lines, framing, symmetry, and perspective, students will learn and use these essential tools for capturing compelling shots. Through hands-on assignments and editing photographs, students will apply these core principles across various subjects in photography such as portraiture, landscape, action, and aesthetic photography. Students hope to evoke emotions, direct the viewer's eye on a specific subject, and create visual interest in their images. Alongside technical skills, students will engage in critique sessions and discussions on historical and contemporary perspectives in photography. The course will culminate in the creation of a digital portfolio, showcasing the students' best work and demonstrating their mastery of composition and photographic techniques.

Photography II – 1st semester course

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Photography I

In Photography II, students will expand upon their foundational knowledge from Photography I by diving deeper into the creative possibilities of digital practices. Through advanced editing techniques and the exploration of unique perspectives, they will further their understanding of the photographic medium, utilizing both DSLR cameras and phone cameras to capture visually compelling images. Additionally, students will refine their skills in many of the Adobe Creative Cloud programs, including Photoshop and Lightroom, and explore the integration of AI-generated images into their work. The course will offer opportunities to explore other creative practices such as mixed media, performance art, installation, and video. Students who have mastered DSLR cameras will have the chance to experiment with traditional film photography. Through hands-on exploration and engaging discussions, students will gain a deep appreciation for photography as a vital component of modern artistry.

Advanced Photography – 1st semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Photography I and Photography II

Building on the studio skills built in Photography II, students are pushed to examine the meaning and concepts behind their work on a deeper level. While students can continue using photography as their primary medium, in this course, students will focus on seeing meaning driving form instead of meaning dictated by form. Other practices open to investigation include but are not limited to mixed media (digital analog), performance art, installation and video art. Students will continue to learn about their own creative process and build on their skills of iteration, reflection, and critique from Photography II. At the end of the semester, students will present a body of work that drives conversation, engagement, and contemplation.

Sculpture – 1st semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This course introduces students to the fundamentals of three-dimensional art through various sculptural techniques and materials. Students will explore traditional and contemporary approaches to sculpture, working with mediums such as clay, wire, wood, plaster, and found objects. Emphasis will be placed on the elements and principles of design, spatial awareness, and craftsmanship. Students will engage in hands-on projects that develop their modeling, assembling, and casting skills while also studying sculpture's historical and cultural significance.

Fiber Arts – 2nd semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This course introduces students to the world of fiber arts, exploring both traditional and contemporary techniques. Students will learn various methods of textile creation, including weaving, knitting, crocheting, felting, embroidery, and dyeing. Through hands-on projects, they will develop an understanding of design, color theory, and craftsmanship while gaining an appreciation for cultural and historical influences in fiber arts.

Students will be encouraged to experiment with different materials and techniques to create unique, expressive pieces. The course emphasizes creativity, patience, and attention to detail, making it suitable for both beginners and those with prior experience in fiber arts.

Ceramics I – 1st semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

Ceramics I is a clay-building class that explores both hand-building methods and wheel-throwing techniques. The emphasis of this course focuses on understanding and applying the aesthetics, processes, forms, and functions of ceramics. Students will build on their prior knowledge of clay to construct not only functional pieces but purely artistic expressions as well. All projects will include exposure to various tools, techniques, history, and vocabulary. Ceramics I is now taught separately from Ceramics II.

Ceramics II – 2nd semester course

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Ceramics I

Ceramics II provides students with the opportunity to develop an in-depth knowledge of and applied skills in the art of ceramics. Wheel techniques will be fully explored, as well as many sculptural and glazing techniques. Activities will be individualized according to the ability level of each student. Students will show and share a body of work at the end of the semester to display their investigation with clay. Ceramics II and Advanced Ceramics are taught together.

Advanced Ceramics – 2nd semester course

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Four 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: Ceramics I and Ceramics II

Advanced Ceramics fosters independent exploration and collaboration, focusing on creating a themed vessel collection. Students refine technical skills, experiment with forms, and document

their creative process to build a portfolio. The course culminates in a demonstration of advanced techniques, preparing students for further study or personal artistic growth.

Advanced Portfolio Development – year course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Six 50 minute periods

Prerequisites: Participation in at least one major level course with a final grade of at least an A-, completed application, teacher recommendation, Department Chair signature, and completion of summer assignment.

Advanced Portfolio Development is a college-level course for motivated students pursuing 2D or 3D media. Guided by a personal inquiry, students explore materials through artist studies, sketchbook research, historical context, and mentorship. A sketchbook documenting ideas, research, and experiments is maintained year-round. Regular critiques support artistic growth. Students will be assessed both formatively and summatively, with two in-class assessments: a first-semester artwork and a final portfolio presentation. The course emphasizes independent studio work, exhibition opportunities, and portfolio development.

AP Studio Art – year course

Open to: 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Six 50 minute periods, during US Lunch

Prerequisites: Participation in Advanced Portfolio Development course, teacher recommendation, department chair signature, and completion of summer assignment.

AP Studio Art is a rigorous, college-level course designed for motivated pupils committed to developing a strong personal portfolio. Pupils will create a Sustained Investigation, exploring a central theme through a series of works, and submit Selected Works that demonstrate technical and conceptual mastery. A sketchbook/journal will document idea development, material exploration, and research on historical and contemporary artists. Regular critiques will foster artistic growth, and additional open studio hours will support independent work. The course culminates in the submission of a portfolio to the College Board in May.

Technology

Design, Engineering, and Coding – 1st semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Two 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This is a hands-on, semester-long course that invites students to design, build, and program a variety of creative projects that incorporate design, engineering, and programming. Students will learn 3D printing, laser cutting, computer-aided design (CAD), basic circuitry, and the fundamentals of computer programming. No prior experience is required other than curiosity and a willingness to experiment. All work will take place in the makerspace and computer lab.

3D Modeling and Animation – 2nd semester course

Open to: 10th - 12th grad

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Two 100 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This is a creative, semester-long, non-programming course where students will learn how to model 3D objects and characters as well as how to animate them to create Pixar-style creations. They will also learn how to 3D print their creations. No previous technical or artistic skills are required, but experience sculpting and a basic understanding of geometric space (x,y,z coordinates) is helpful. This course will use the Blender 3D modeling & animation software and all work will be done on the lab computers. Students can, however, use their own laptops if they choose (Mac or PC).

9th Grade Computer Science – one semester course (offered 1st and 2nd semester)

Open to: 9th grade

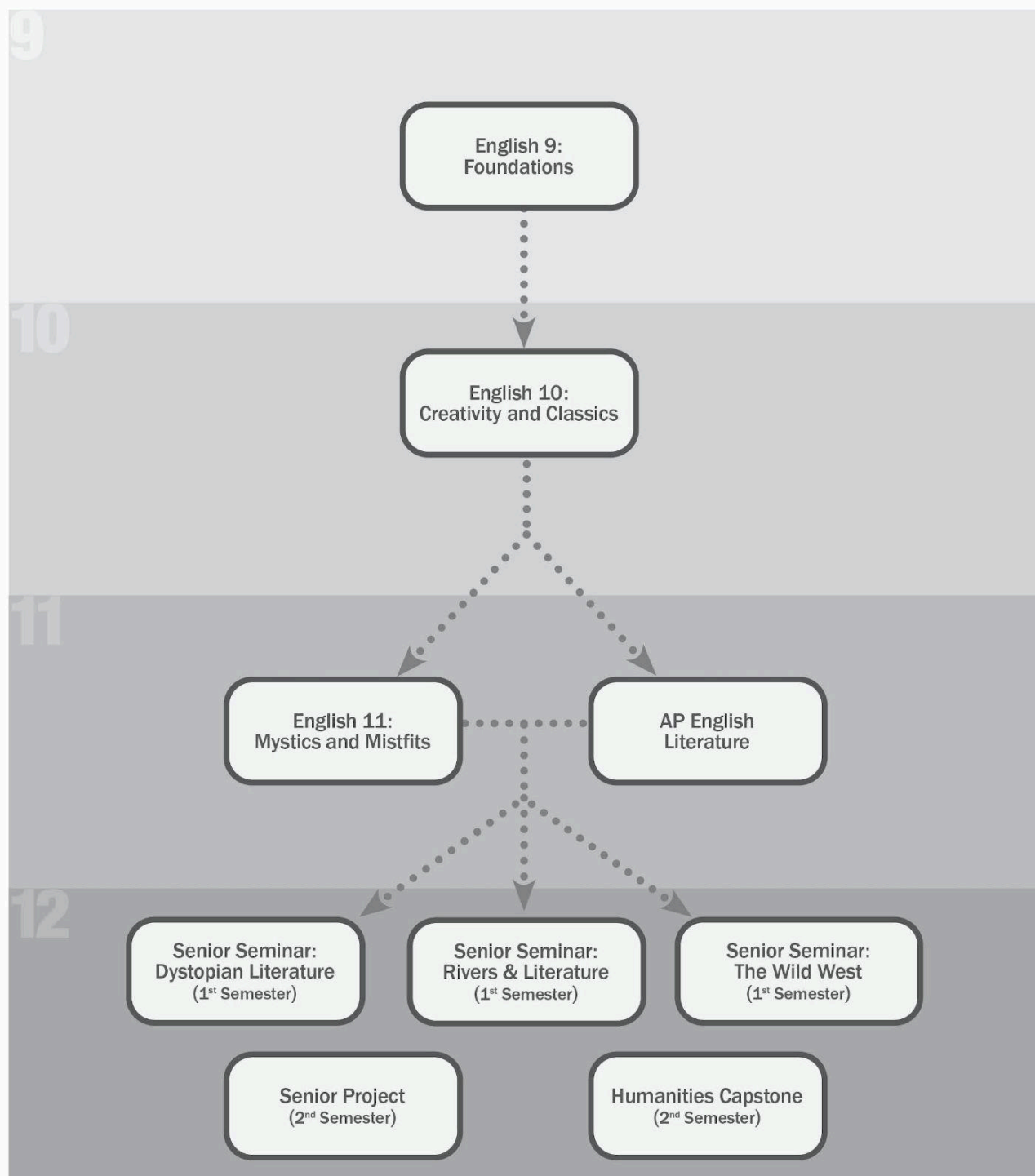
Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

Students will gain exposure to computer programming, computational thinking, and some of the current trends in computer science. In doing so, they will sample a variety of programming languages, learn what goes into building a basic app, and gain a better understanding of how the Internet and the World Wide Web work. The goal is for students to have hands-on coding challenges and experiences that help them better understand the world of computer science and the unique problem solving skills required to succeed at it.

English

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression



English

The English Department is proud to offer classes that reflect the diverse literary landscape of our country and our world. In our quest to open our students' hearts and minds to perspectives and viewpoints beyond their own, we provide a curriculum that draws from varied canons so that many voices are heard and appreciated. To that end, we utilize Harkness tables, wooden oval tables that allow discussion to be the primary method of learning. The US English program follows a developmental progression of increasing sophistication in grammar, vocabulary, discussion skills, writing, and reading in each 9th-11th grade classroom. AP English Literature is offered to 11th grade students with solid skills in critical reading and writing. In 12th grade, all students will have the choice of three Senior English classes, Rivers & Literature, Dystopian Literature, and The Wild West. Running the course Rivers & Literature is dependent on river permits and available calendar dates. Second semester of senior year, all seniors will take part in Humanities Capstone, a one-semester course, as well as Senior Project, in which they will pursue research writing, reading, and reflection.

English 9: Foundations – year course

Open to: 9th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This is a required yearlong course for all 9th graders, which focuses on the study of diverse texts both modern and classic that allow for a wide variety of perspectives. We will put social justice into context by reading novels, short stories, poetry, and essays that inform our students of the relevance of other people's experiences. The content of the class allows students to focus on varied points of view in order to better acknowledge differences and similarities between themselves and the characters. We also strive to establish the foundation necessary for upper-level skill progression in English. Skills are based in crafting interesting sentence structure, poetry, analysis, discussion, writing, and creative projects. An emphasis on effective ways to use language through 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person points of view pervades all that we do in 9th grade so that students are practicing skills that will aid them through the rest of their academic careers. The Harkness table provides students with opportunities to hone listening and speaking skills and allows them to cultivate their own voices and opinions in discussion.

English 10: Creativity and Classics – year course

Open to: 10th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This is a required yearlong course for all sophomores. The 10th grade year in English studies texts both modern and classic that explore how and why characters do what they do, regardless of differences in time, culture, race, and language. Skills are based in creative expression, analysis, discussion, essays, and projects. Students learn and use grammar skills and a sophisticated vocabulary in order to speak and write articulately, as well as to prepare for standardized tests. Students leave this course with the ability to participate effectively in discussion, explore creative non-fiction, critically examine texts, write interesting and analytical papers, and use correct mechanics to communicate.

English 11: Mystics & Misfits – year course

Open to: 11th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This course is one of two offered to juniors, and it will focus on texts that highlight the difficulties in being an outcast in one's society. We expect our students to learn to independently evaluate texts for theme, characterization, craft, and context. To that end, we will investigate novels, poems, short stories, essays, and personal narratives, capped by our Junior Retreat, a place-based opportunity to connect literature to life. Student-led discussion constitutes the primary method of learning in order to carry on the Harkness tradition of strong speaking and listening skills. Students hone their skills in writing personal narratives, comparing and contrasting essays, and literary analyses with the goal of practicing different organizational structures to advance effective communication. Vocabulary and grammar are regular components of the daily work in this class.

AP English Literature – year course

Open to: 11th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: High A- or higher in English 10, current teacher and Department Chair signature upon consideration of application, and completion of a summer assignment

This is an optional, yearlong course open to 11th grade students who have achieved a high level of success and sophistication in their English skills. Prerequisites must be met for admission into this course. Attendance in this class guarantees a student's commitment to taking the AP English Literature exam in May. This class will provide a typical VMS experience in English, with seminar discussions and in-depth conversations about literature, but will also focus on AP specific skills like multiple choice tests and essay responses. Similar to their peers in 11th grade English, students will follow texts that are not only canonical but connected to our Junior Retreat, a place-based opportunity to see literature come to life. The AP English Literature course also demands a close attention to grammar, vocabulary, rhetoric, writing skills, and a focus on nonfiction texts, in addition to the typical study of literature found in VMS English classes.

Senior Seminar: Rivers & Literature – 1st semester course

Open to: 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

Throughout the course of human history, water has been both physically and metaphorically life-giving. Rivers provide the tools that we as humans need to survive: we bathe, drink, travel, irrigate, and baptize in the waters that flow through our world. Equally as important, rivers also embody those qualities that are somewhat less quantifiable: enlightenment, quests, fulfillment, sacredness, love, and the sublime. In this era of increasing drought and weather-induced changes, it is even more crucial to examine the relationship between humans and water, especially in the west—our home waters. To provide students with a firsthand understanding of our connection and reliance on rivers, this course will include a four-day river trip on the San Juan River in Utah with the Canyonlands Field Institute. Students expect a variety of texts including: novels, short stories, creative nonfiction and nonfiction essays, and through their own analysis and creative writing.

Possible texts include: *Desert Solitaire*, Edward Abbey; *Encounters with the Archdruid*, John McPhee; Terry Tempest Williams; Pamela Houston; *The River Why*, David James Duncan; etc.

Senior Seminar: Dystopian Literature – 1st semester course

Open to: 12th grade

Meetings per two week rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

When given the chance, our minds often frequent alternate realities where our “could bes” become certainties: racial justice pervades, women run the world, animals avoid extinction, etc. While these new worlds appear idealistic, they often come with mishaps and horrors of their own. This class will examine how authors have used speculative and science fiction as tools to unpack and explore issues in modern society. While this class allows students to peer into unknown worlds, it also necessitates self-reflection in order to see humanity, and ourselves, in the truest light. Possible texts include: *V for Vendetta*; Alan Moore; *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Margaret Atwood; *The Lathe of Heaven*, Ursula LeGuin; *A Boy and His Dog at the End of the World*, C. A. Fletcher.

Senior Seminar: The Wild West – 1st semester course

Open to: 12th grade

Meetings per two week rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

This class will delve into the romanticism, mystique, and also, frankly, the prejudices and historical atrocities of the Old West. We are not so far removed from the windswept plains, wild horses, and tumbling tumbleweeds of our Western heritage. Our literature will focus on the breaking of stereotypes regarding women’s roles, buffalo soldiers, and “cowboys and Indians” by providing insight into a way of life that has not entirely disappeared today. Expect creative and literary analysis writing assignments, and excursions to ranches, land libraries, college campuses, and our own backyard. Texts may include: *All the Pretty Horses*, Cormac McCarthy; *Buffalo Soldier*, Tanya Landman; “The Federation of Black Cowboys,” Eric Martz; *True Grit*, Charles Portis; *Half-Broke Horses*, Jeanette Walls; *The Brave Cowboy*, Ed Abbey; “Mustang”; and others.

Humanities Capstone Seminar – 2nd semester course

Open to: 12th grade

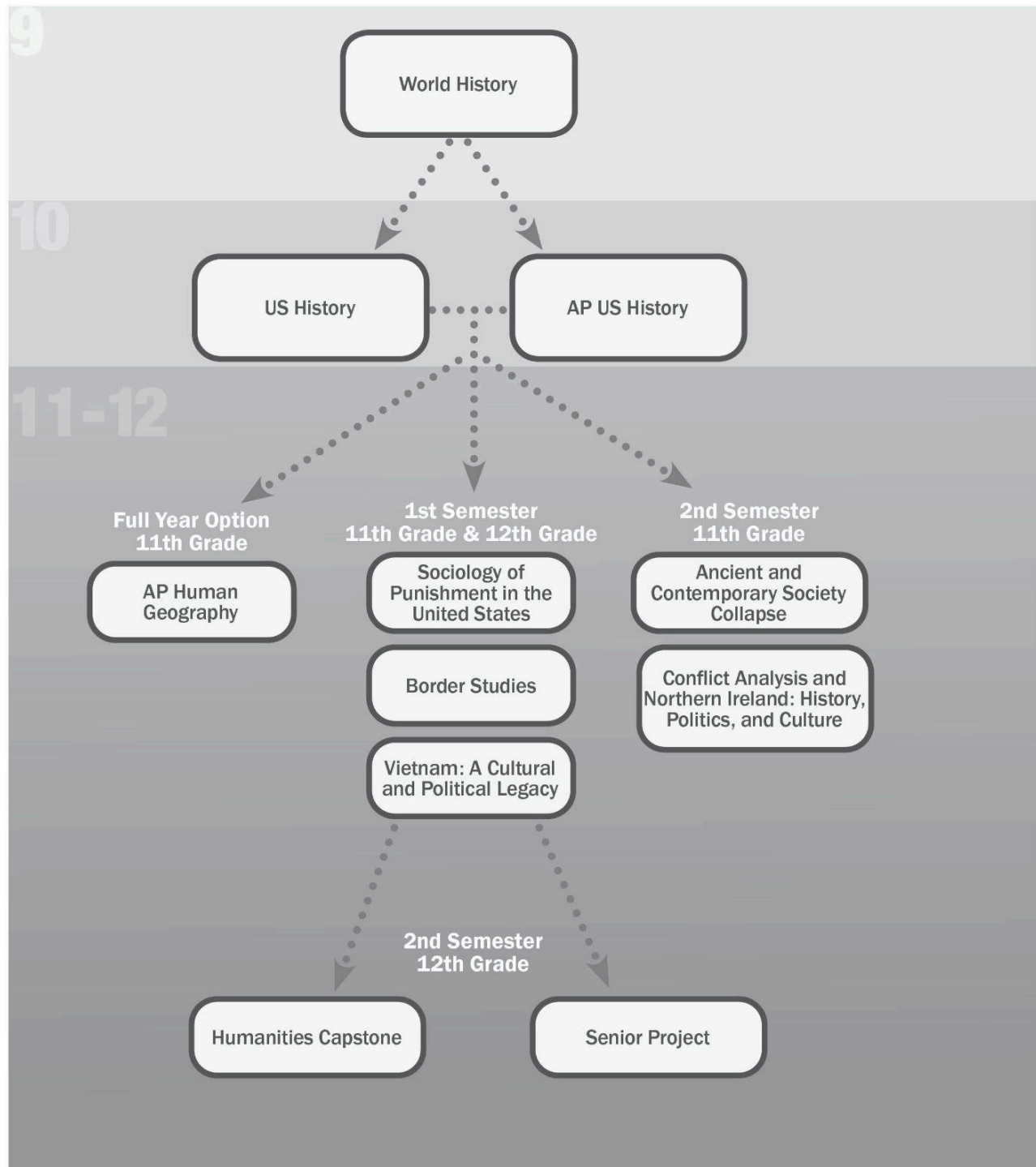
Meetings per ten-day rotation: Varies

Prerequisites: History 9-12, English 9-12

In the 12th grade Humanities Capstone Seminar, students will explore essential questions that are at the core of the human condition through an interdisciplinary lens. This course will help students explore core topics related to happiness, ethics, and purpose. Diverse and interdisciplinary sources will be used to explore questions including but not limited to: What is truth? Is there such a thing as right and wrong? What is our duty to others? Where do we derive purpose, meaning, happiness, and well-being? Students will explore these questions through literature, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. Students will learn through a combination of seminar style discussions, lectures, primary and secondary source readings, films, and literature. Students will be assessed through regular response papers, analytical essays, and facilitation of group discussions.

History

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression



History

The underlying goal of the curriculum is to enhance students' understanding and appreciation of how forces influence the course of global human history, from the Enlightenment to today. Students learn through projects as well as texts (primary and secondary sources), debate, research analysis, document analysis, written analysis, and discussion. By asking students to apply their knowledge of the past to the challenges of the future in an increasingly "globalized" world, students develop a critical global perspective as well as an understanding of the responsibilities they have as individuals and citizens in a democratic society.

The Upper School history curriculum begins in the 9th grade, focusing on global history and geography from the ideals of the Enlightenment through the present. Students examine the formation of the modern world through the lenses of history, politics, economics, and geography. With this solid background in world history, students in 10th grade are ready to focus on the major forces that have shaped the United States, such as political liberalism, nationalism, industrialization, and imperialism. First semester 11th grade students will have the choice of either three thematic courses or one yearlong AP course. Second semester, 11th graders who are not in AP course will choose one of two thematic course offerings. 12th graders during their first semester will have the opportunity to take one of three thematic courses. Second semester, 12th grade will exchange history and English for their Senior Project and Humanities Capstone Class.

World History – year course

Open to: 9th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

The Cuban educator Jose Martí stated, "In order to know what is, it is necessary to know what was." Ninth grade World History is based upon that assertion. In this course, students are provided with an introduction to the nature of history as a discipline as we research major global developments that have shaped our world from the Enlightenment through the end of the Second World War. Students will become proficient in analyzing primary and secondary source material to assess the causes, course, and consequence of important events. Students will also be expected to further their skills as historians, with the goal of developing a personal point of view as to why things happened, and to argue that point of view successfully. This includes evaluating economic, political, and social factors as they have influenced, and continue to influence, our historical development. Students are expected to be motivated and seek to understand themselves in our rapidly changing world. This course will involve students in a dynamic investigation of their world. It is an intellectual, analytical journey, with a deep, personal, emotional component that encapsulates our VMS mission and nurtures empathy.

U.S. History – year course

Open to: 10th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History

The past is studied to better understand the present, and in United States History, this is achieved by focusing on life for people of all backgrounds, spanning the pre-Columbian period to today. The course offers an analytical survey of the political, economic, and social forces that have shaped the nation. Moving chronologically through key eras, the course highlights evolving notions of American identity and values while examining the competing interests of diverse groups. Students will investigate both the barriers to power and the opportunities that have defined the country's history. By engaging with a variety of learning methods, students will connect current events and issues to historical roots to better understand one's responsibilities as an American. Through critical reflection, students will consider how the nation's past informs its present and develop an appreciation for citizenship, recognizing each generation's role in shaping and strengthening American democracy in the ongoing effort to "form a more perfect Union."

AP U.S. History – year course

Open to: 10th grade

Meetings per ten day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History. Students must complete their 9th grade year with an A- or higher in World History (year-end grade). Students must be recommended by the previous history teacher and approved by the Department Chair. Students must submit a completed application and sit for a timed DBQ assessment (extended time will be given to those who have the accommodation) that will be used to assess students' ability to analyze historical documents, construct a well-supported argument, and demonstrate critical thinking skills under timed conditions. This assessment helps determine readiness for the rigorous reading, writing, and analytical demands of an AP history course. Students must also complete the summer assignment before the start of school in August.

Advanced Placement United States History is a college-level course for students seeking to immerse themselves in the study of the American experience. This fast-paced course uses discussions of readings, essay writing, and collaborative and investigative methods to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful on the AP exam. Students refine their analytical abilities and critical thinking skills and gain a sophisticated understanding of historical and geographical context, make multicultural comparisons, and interpret changing historical frameworks.

AP Human Geography – year course

Open to: 11th grade (Please note: Students who elect into this course will not be able to elect into any other thematic course their 11th grade year. They may do so their Senior year first semester)

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History and U.S. History. Students must complete their 10th grade year with an A- or higher in U.S. History (year-end grade). Students must be recommended by the previous history teacher and approved by the Department Chair. Students must submit a completed application and writing sample from their current history class by the designated due date. Students must also complete the summer assignment.

Per the College Board, “AP Human Geography is an introductory college-level human geography course. Students cultivate their understanding of human geography through data and geographic analyses as they explore topics like patterns and spatial organization, human impacts and interactions with their environment, and spatial processes and societal changes.” In this thematic course, topics are organized around the main subfields of human geography: economic geography, cultural geography, political geography, and urban geography. The course will employ case studies from around the world to help students understand both the history of different regions and the contemporary problems of our world today. Other topics to address include “globalization, colonialism, and human–environment relationships on places, regions, cultural landscapes, and patterns of interaction.” This rigorous course will require students to spend a great deal of time outside of class learning the content and reinforcing the necessary skills to find success on the AP test.

1st Semester Course Offerings for 11th and 12th Grade

Border Studies – 1st semester course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: US History and World History

Societies have used borders to define land areas and control populations since before the emergence of modern nation states. Through conflict, societal constructs, and modern geopolitical diplomacy, borders have become central to our global society. This course will explore the origins, meaning, and impacts of borders through a multinational lens, seeking to understand a diverse range of perspectives. Social, cultural, ideological, political, economic, and environmental factors will be explored for each of our case studies. While modern geopolitics may dictate shifts in the curriculum, students will likely explore the following borders: India/Pakistan, United States/Mexico, China/Tibet, Israel/Palestine. Students will also explore efforts to transcend borders, including the European Union, and the African Union. Coursework will explore historical and contemporary sources of various mediums (texts, primary and secondary sources, scholarly essays, maps, images, and videos) and students will be expected to engage in analysis, interpretation, and critical judgment through readings, discussions, research, GIS story maps, and personal and analytical essays.

Vietnam: A Cultural & Political Legacy - 1st semester course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History and US History

The Vietnam War remains one of the most divisive and consequential conflicts in U.S. history, profoundly shaping American politics, society, and culture. More than just a military engagement, it sparked fierce debates in streets, universities, and political institutions, leaving a lasting impact on an entire generation. Its consequences continue to influence U.S. foreign policy, public trust in government, and cultural expressions of resistance and remembrance. This course will examine the Vietnam War's various theaters—both on the battlefield and within American society—analyzing how one conflict had such far-reaching effects. Students will engage with diverse sources, including films, music, literature, journalism, historical scholarship, and political discourse, to explore multiple perspectives on the war. Through discussion and analysis, students will evaluate different historical interpretations, from official narratives to firsthand accounts, developing a deeper understanding of America's role in Vietnam, the complexities of war, and its lasting legacy in shaping contemporary debates on foreign policy, military intervention, and civic activism.

Sociology of Punishment in the United States – 1st semester course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History and US History

The United States incarcerates more people than any other country in the world. In this course, students will examine American punishment and social control from historical, theoretical, and contemporary perspectives. They will consider the changing ideologies and practices of state-sponsored punishment that have led to the expansion of imprisonment and other forms of penal supervision in the United States. Students will spend a significant amount of the course

examining the evolution of the United States' notions of punishment and justice. Drawing on theoretical accounts of punishment, historical examinations of prison and parole, and contemporary studies of criminal law and sentencing, students will consider social control as it plays out via institutionalized contexts, namely prisons and asylums, as well as alternative sanctions, such as coerced treatment. Students will identify the major phases of penal development and consider mass imprisonment as both a reflection and cause of racial and economic inequality. Students will follow past and current political and social movements that have resulted in the rise and fall of incarceration.

2nd Semester Course Offerings for 11th Grade

Ancient and Contemporary Society Collapse – 2nd semester course

Open to: 11th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History and U.S. History

Why do civilizations collapse? This course considers the ways in which climate has influenced the development of human societies. Societal collapse is well-documented in the prehistoric and early historic records of Mesopotamia, China, Mesoamerica, North America, and the Andes. How do these civilizations' downfalls compare and contrast? There is historical debate about the nature of these events (environmental degradation prior to and at the time of collapse, the level of resilience, megadroughts, etc.). This course will examine archaeological and historical records to look at societies' vulnerabilities, resiliencies, and adaptations in the face of contending claims of abrupt climate change and anthropogenic (human-made) effects. Students will use their knowledge to apply it to the modern day. Are humans on the same track? What lessons can society draw from the past for the present? What are the narratives of "collapse" and "decline"? Students will have a culminating project analyzing the patterns of civilization collapse.

Conflict Analysis and Northern Ireland: History, Politics and Culture – 2nd semester course

Open to: 11th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: World History and U.S. History

The Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde famously commented that "The problem is the English can't remember history, and the Irish can't forget it." English rule over Ireland dates back to the 12th century, followed in the 16th century by Queen Elizabeth I's policy of encouraging large-scale immigration of Scottish Protestants to the north of Ireland in order to displace Irish Catholics. Thus began the ascendancy of an Anglo-Irish Protestant minority over an Irish Catholic majority in Ireland. The 20th century witnessed a sustained campaign in Ireland to break the link with Great Britain, which was met in the north with a campaign to maintain the link, or union, with Great Britain. These campaigns amount to what is commonly referred to as "The Troubles," taking the lives of over 3,500 people. This course will examine the conflict and its importance from different perspectives: Republican, Nationalist, Unionist, and Loyalist, as well as successive British and Irish governments. The class goal will be to work towards an understanding of the motivators that led to the Good Friday Agreement (1998) in order to gain greater insight and appreciation of the factors, and sacrifices, that enable conflict resolution in a modern context. This course will culminate in individual student research projects (and presentations) which analyze the origin and evolution of a chosen global conflict, that then map out a detailed path toward conflict resolution.

Humanities Capstone Seminar – 2nd semester course

Open to: 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Varies

Prerequisites: History 9-12, English 9-12

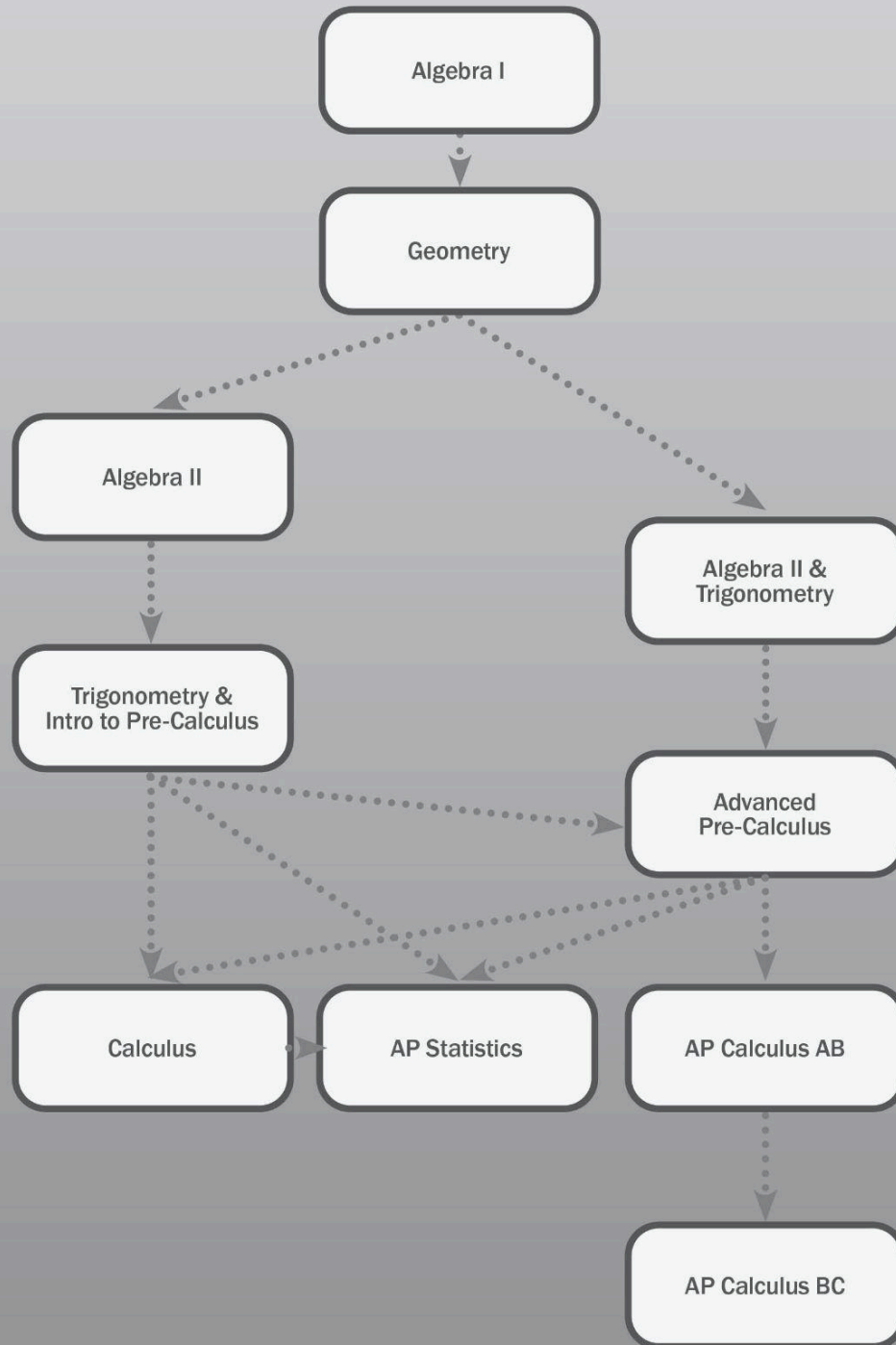
In the 12th grade Humanities Capstone Seminar, students will explore essential questions that are at the core of the human condition through an interdisciplinary lens. This course will help students explore core topics related to happiness, ethics, and purpose. Diverse and interdisciplinary sources will be used to explore questions including but not limited to: What is truth? Is there such a thing as right and wrong? What is one's duty to others? Where does one derive purpose, meaning, happiness, and well-being? Students will explore these questions through literature, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. Students will learn through a combination of seminar style discussions, lectures, primary and secondary source readings, films, and literature. Students will be assessed through regular response papers, analytical essays, and facilitation of group discussions.

Mathematics

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression



9-12



Mathematics

The Upper School Mathematics Department aims to prepare students for the challenges of collegiate level rigor by creating exceptional problem-solvers through the development of quantitative and logical reasoning skills. To be inclusive of all learners, students are carefully placed within our fluid course progression and differentiated instruction is at the forefront of our teaching methodologies. The Mathematics Department hopes to influence students' lives in such a way that they become independent learners and strategic planners who embrace the interdisciplinary nature of mathematics and, in turn, can make positive contributions to their communities.

Fundamentals of Mathematics and Pre-Algebra must be completed before entering Upper School.

Algebra I – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Pre-Algebra

Algebra I builds upon the concepts mastered in Pre-Algebra. Students explore increasingly complex linear functions, including the graphs and applications of these functions, and learn to solve multi-step equations. Solving for two variables is introduced through systems of linear equations, and students develop a deeper understanding of exponents. The year culminates with students exploring nonlinear functions, such as exponential and quadratic relations, as a foundation for their studies in Algebra II.

Geometry – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Algebra I

Geometry introduces and explores logical and spatial reasoning through the use of both inductive and deductive reasoning. Two-column proofs are introduced and applied to proving lines parallel and triangles congruent. Algebra is a necessary prerequisite for this course, as students must have knowledge of linear graphing and frequently use geometric principles to create and solve algebraic equations. Additional topics covered in this course include: the Pythagorean Theorem, similar triangles, relationships in triangles, properties of quadrilaterals, area of polygons and circles, trigonometric ratios, and surface area and volume of geometric solids. Connections are made between the concepts and their applications in the real world.

Algebra II – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Geometry

Algebra II is an in-depth study of linear, quadratic, polynomial, exponential, and logarithmic functions. Students learn to distinguish the characteristics of equations and graphs of each of these functions, and then apply them in a variety of situations, often through the use of a graphing

calculator. Through both independent and group problem-solving, students strengthen their skills, both with and without the use of a calculator, which will be the foundation for future math courses in high school and college.

Algebra II/Trigonometry – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Strong performance in Algebra I and Geometry, teacher recommendation, and completion of summer assignment.

This rigorous, fast-paced class essentially combines two courses, Algebra II and an introduction to Trigonometry. Through the fall and winter, the course will focus on an in-depth study of linear, quadratic, polynomial, radical, exponential, and logarithmic functions. Students learn to distinguish the characteristics of equations and graphs for the different types of functions and then apply them in a variety of situations. During the spring, students use right triangle trigonometry, the law of sines, and the law of cosines to solve triangles and in application problems. Periodic functions are used to discover the graphs of the trigonometric functions and their inverses. Both no-calculator and calculator-active approaches to problem-solving are emphasized throughout the course.

Trigonometry & Introduction to Precalculus – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisite: Algebra II

Trigonometry and Introduction to Precalculus begins with a review of linear, quadratic, and polynomial functions. Students then cover introductory precalculus concepts including logarithmic and exponential functions, conic sections, and basic rational functions. In the second semester, students begin their study of trigonometry by reviewing right triangle trigonometry. Oblique triangles are solved using the law of sines and the law of cosines. The unit circle is used to introduce radian measure and the periodic nature of trigonometric graphs. Students solve trigonometric equations with various domain restrictions. Real-world application problems are solved by making use of sinusoidal wave modeling. Both no-calculator and calculator-active approaches to problem solving are emphasized throughout the course.

Advanced Precalculus – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisite: Algebra II/Trigonometry or Trigonometry/Intro to Precalculus

Advanced Precalculus is a fast-paced course that begins by focusing on transformations of graphs, function composition, inverse functions, and an in-depth study of both rational functions and conic sections. Students extend their knowledge of trigonometry using an analytic approach to prove complex trigonometric identities and solve trigonometric equations. Vectors are introduced and applied to navigation using trigonometry. Students will also explore vector operations, polar coordinate representations, sequences and series, and combinations and permutations. The year culminates with a study of limits and derivatives in preparation for first-year calculus. The use of a graphing calculator is emphasized throughout the course.

Calculus – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisite: Advanced Precalculus or Trigonometry and Introduction to Precalculus

Calculus is a course designed to explore topics in differential and integral calculus. Though students will study many of the same topics as the AP Calculus AB course, the pace of this course is less intense in order to allow time for review and depth in mastery. Limits are used to develop the derivative concept, and rules are established for finding derivatives of several classes of functions. Applications in differential calculus are studied including graphing, related rates, and optimization investigations. The fundamental theorem of calculus is applied to develop the integral concept, and integration is used in solving area, volume, and accumulated change problems. The use of a graphing calculator is emphasized throughout the course.

AP Calculus AB – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Advanced Precalculus, application with recommendation from current teacher and Department Chair, and completion of the summer assignment

Calculus AB is an advanced placement course with an equal focus on differential and integral calculus. The concept of the derivative is defined, and rules are established for finding the derivatives of elementary functions. Derivatives are used to graph functions, and applications are made to optimization, related rates of change, and the motion of an object along a line. The definite integral is defined and evaluated using the fundamental theorem of calculus. Applications of definite integrals include finding the area under a curve, volumes of solids of revolution, the distance traveled by an object moving along a line, and accumulated change. Students conclude the year by taking the Advanced Placement test, which may qualify them for college credit.

AP Calculus BC – year course

Open to: Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisite: Successful completion of AP Calculus AB, completion of application with a recommendation from current teacher and Department Chair, and completion of the summer assignment

Calculus BC is an Advanced Placement course that builds upon the foundation established in Calculus AB. Differential and integral calculus concepts are reviewed, and applications are explored at a more rigorous level than in Calculus AB. Numerous new integration techniques are introduced. Solutions to differential equations are approximated using Euler's Method. The calculus of parametric equations is applied to motion in two dimensions. Students calculate the area between curves using integration in polar coordinates. They apply a variety of methods to determine the convergence or divergence of an infinite series. Students then create and analyze power series, in the form of Taylor and Maclaurin series, to represent transcendental functions. Students conclude the year by taking the Advanced Placement exam, which may qualify them for college credit.

AP Statistics – year course

Open to: *Students who have met the prerequisites and whose path indicates that the course is appropriate*

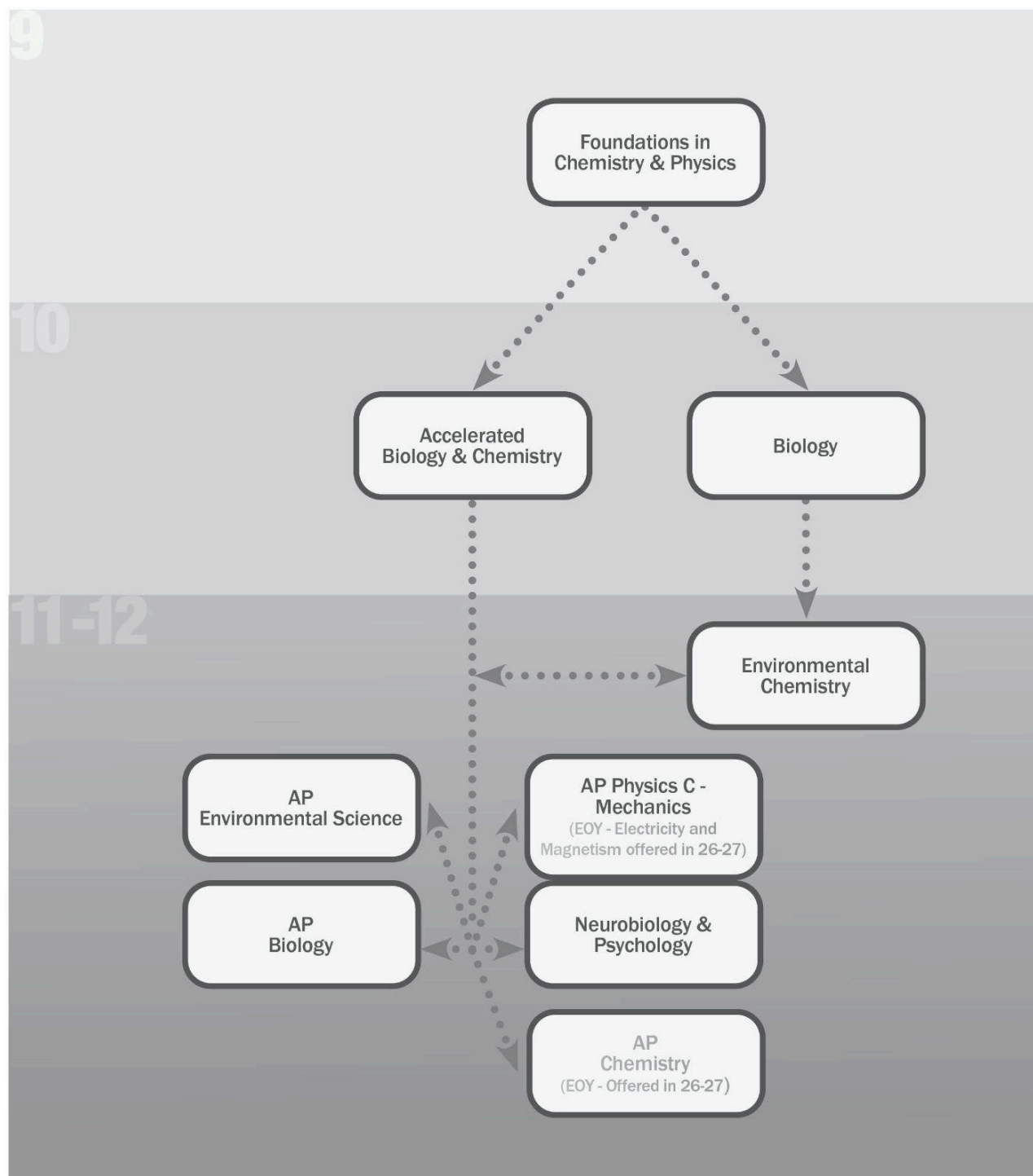
Meetings per ten-day rotation: *Five 80 minute periods*

Prerequisite: *Trigonometry and Introduction to Precalculus or Advanced Precalculus. Completion of application with a recommendation from current teacher and Department Chair. Completion of the summer assignment*

AP Statistics covers the fundamentals of statistical analysis and their applications to real-world data. The year begins with a focus on core concepts, such as graphing, collecting and summarizing data, probability, and working with statistical models. Throughout the second half of the year, these topics will be revisited in different contexts to practice producing and evaluating data, working towards applications of statistical inference. Students will use technology (graphing calculators and spreadsheet generators) to aid in and strengthen their statistical analysis. Students choosing to enroll in the AP course will be held to high standards of depth and mastery and will be required to take the AP Statistics exam in May.

Science

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression



Science

Science courses in Upper School offer students a survey of the core sciences through lab-based instruction. In all classes, students design unique and genuine experiments. Ninth grade students learn practical skills and physical science concepts through interactive explorations which prepares them well for higher-level thinking and communicating effectively as future scientists in advanced courses. Starting in 10th grade, students can select a traditional route or an accelerated route. Depending on the route taken, students have numerous choices during junior and senior year designed to support any college aspiration. AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, AP Physics C, AP Chemistry, and Neurobiology and Psychology are offered to students who have met the prerequisites. Students are expected to take four years of science in their time at VMS.

Foundations in Chemistry & Physics – year course

Open to: 9th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

In this course, students will practice thinking scientifically by studying and experimenting with the physical world. Topics in both chemistry and physics will be covered in both classroom and lab settings to introduce students to the Upper School course offerings. Interactive labs and demonstrations will be used to strengthen important science skills like collecting measurements and making sense of data. This course will prepare students to think critically about the physical world and give them direction in the science course offerings available to Upper School students.

Biology – year course

Open to: 10th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Foundations in Chemistry and Physics

This year-long Biology course is anchored in phenomena and aligned to Next Generation Science Standards. This course guides students to go beyond traditional science content by embedding community science into the curriculum. Students focus on real-world phenomena relevant to their lives, authentically engaging with science and engineering practices. Three broad units pose guiding questions, in which students ask and investigate their own questions related to anchoring phenomena. The phenomena that students work together to explain are: antibiotic resistance and a bird population that evolved new traits (Evolution), Duchenne Muscular dystrophy and gene editing (Genetics), how trees can mitigate climate change and population changes among large animals on the Serengeti (Ecosystems). Students engage in practices where they investigate, make sense of phenomena and problems, construct and critique models, and develop explanations and arguments. After completing this course, students will be well prepared for future coursework in the biological sciences in college or AP Biology during their senior year.

Accelerated Biology & Chemistry – year course

Open to: 10th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: B+ or higher in Foundations in Chemistry & Physics; current teacher and Department Chair recommendation required

Students will be well prepared for AP Biology, AP Environmental Science or AP Chemistry after completing this class and will be ready for STEM coursework in college.

Chemistry

This course is designed to give students a rich understanding of how and why matter interacts on earth in an accelerated semester of instruction. Students develop a strong foundation in the language of chemistry and learn how to apply this foundation to increasingly complex reactions. Many lab investigations will be conducted to bring concepts to life as students learn how to report data properly in support of conclusions. Areas of study include: bonding, formulas, qualitative reactions, stoichiometry, acid-base chemistry, and oxidation-reduction reactions.

Biology

This laboratory science course takes a molecular approach to the study of life while also integrating the driving force of evolution in shaping life's metabolism. Students will learn how life works at the molecular level through numerous lab investigations and will improve their communication skills through well-supported lab analysis and write-ups. Essential metabolic processes will be examined closely including: a survey of biochemical structure and function; cells and membrane transport; cellular respiration; protein synthesis; cellular division; and molecular genetics.

Environmental Chemistry – year course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Foundations in Chemistry & Physics

This course provides a comprehensive exploration of the chemistry that shapes our environment, focusing on air, water, soil, and energy. Students will develop a strong foundation in the language of chemistry and apply it to understand the interactions of matter on Earth. Key topics include atmospheric chemistry and air pollution, water chemistry and water pollution, fossil fuels and renewable energy, hazardous waste, bonding, stoichiometry, equilibrium, thermodynamics, acid-base chemistry, and oxidation-reduction reactions. Through inquiry-driven labs, case studies, and a “storyline” instructional approach for select topics, students will engage in hands-on investigations and group-based work to connect rigorous content to real-world environmental challenges.

Neurobiology and Psychology – year course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Biology and Chemistry

This course will explore Neuroscience and Psychology through the lens of scientific inquiry. Students will understand how the physiology of the brain helps to explain human behavior and disorders of the brain. Neuroscience is the study of the nervous system and its constitutive parts—nerve cells and neural circuits—and the way in which these structures interact with the environment to mediate behavior (Psychology). In this yearlong course, students will explore the structure and function of the nervous system—from the microscopic inner workings of a single nerve cell, to the transmission of signals within a network of neurons, to the staggering complexity

of the brain. Case studies will be used frequently to connect learning with differences of the human brain. Students can expect lab and group-based work, written analyses, and rigorous content.

AP Environmental Science – year course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Biology (or B+ in Accelerated Biology); current teacher and Department Chair signature on completed application; and completion of summer assignment

The AP Environmental Science course is designed to be the equivalent of a one-semester, introductory college course in environmental science. This course is a rigorous science course that stresses scientific principles and analysis through labs, field trips, professional speakers, and numerous in class activities. The content of the course follows the AP curriculum and will give students a deeper understanding of current environmental issues and a framework to understand human impacts and future solutions. Topics of study include: ecosystems, population dynamics, earth systems, land use, energy, biodiversity, pollution and global change.

AP Physics C - Mechanics – year course (offered every other year — will be offered in 2025-2026)

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Foundations in Physical Science and Calculus corequisite; current teacher and Department Chair signature on completed application; and completion of the summer assignment

This is a calculus-based, college-level physics course, especially appropriate for students planning to specialize or major in physical science or engineering, but also valuable for any student motivated to build problem solving and analytical skills in science. The course explores topics such as motion, balance, forces, energy and momentum for linear, 3d, and rotational motion. Introductory differential and integral calculus are used throughout the course, making AP Calculus AB a corequisite course. The class will involve written problem solving both in class and at home in support of substantial hands-on labs as well as demonstrations and investigations into real world applications. The syllabus of this course will follow the format laid out by the College Board in order to prepare students to take the AP exam in May. By the end of this course, students will better understand the rules that govern moving objects in our universe and how to design, build, and study physical structures.

AP Physics C - Electricity and Magnetism – year course (offered every other year — will be offered in 2026-2027)

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Foundations in Chemistry & Physics and Calculus corequisite; current teacher and Department Chair signature on completed application; and completion of the summer assignment

This is a calculus-based, college-level physics course, especially appropriate for students planning to specialize or major in physical science or engineering. The course explores topics such as electrostatics; conductors, capacitors, and dielectrics; electric circuits; magnetic fields and electromagnetism. Introductory differential and integral calculus is used throughout the course, making Calculus a corequisite course. The class will involve written problem-solving both in class

and at home in support of substantial hands-on labs as well as demonstrations and investigations into real-world applications. The syllabus of this course will follow the format laid out by the College Board in order to prepare students to take the AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism exam in May. By the end of this course, students will better understand the role that charged particles play in the universe, and how the motion of and forces generated by those charged particles can generate large scale phenomena.

AP Biology – year course

Open to: 11th and 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Biology (or B+ in Accelerated Biology); current teacher and Department Chair signature on completed application; and completion of the summer assignment

This is a college-level biology course aimed at providing an in-depth look at the structures and processes governing life on Earth. Biochemistry, heredity, natural selection, and ecology are the focus areas of this class. Numerous labs are designed for students to improve science practices while gathering evidence to support scientific claims. All students prepare for and take the AP Biology exam in the spring. By the end of this class, students will have developed an enduring understanding of the essential interactions that shape life on Earth, from the molecular to the ecosystem level.

AP Chemistry – year course (offered every other year — will be offered in 2024-2025)

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Chemistry (or a B+ in Accelerated Chemistry); must be enrolled in or have taken Precalculus or higher math; Department Chair signature on completed application; and completion of the summer assignment

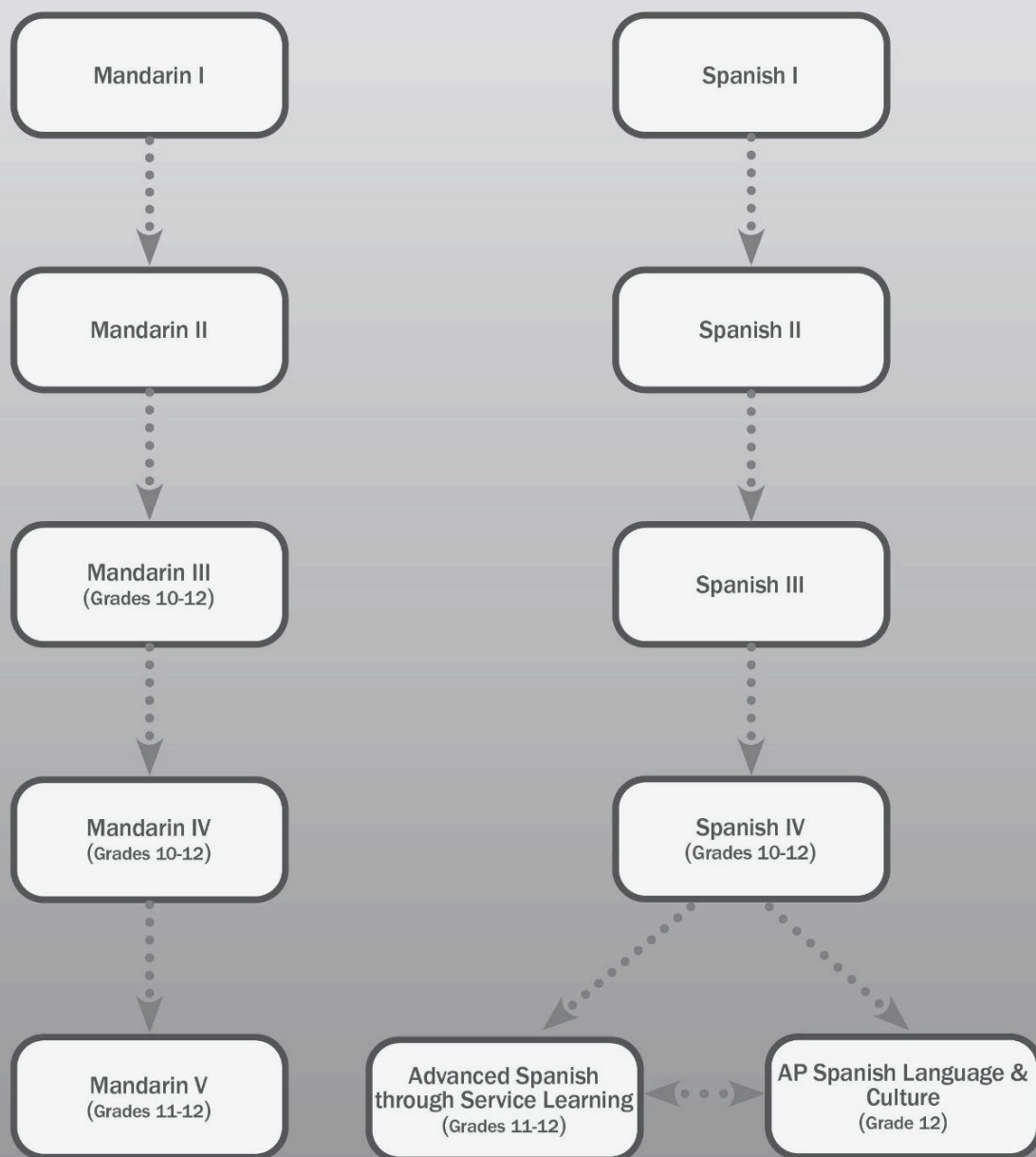
The AP Chemistry course provides students with a foundation to support future advanced coursework in chemistry. Students develop critical thinking and reasoning skills through class work and extensive lab work. Understanding of chemistry and science practices/literacy will be developed as students explore topics such as atomic structure, intermolecular forces and bonding, chemical reactions, kinetics, thermodynamics, and equilibrium. By the end of this course, students will have acquired the skills and knowledge to be successful on the AP exam and in future college-level coursework.

World Languages

2025 - 2026 Upper School Course Progression



9-12



World Languages

One of the overarching goals of the World Languages Department is for students to cultivate an intrinsic interest in a critical world language that they will carry with them long after they complete their studies at VMS. To accomplish this goal, the department strives to develop high levels of language proficiency alongside an increasingly profound understanding of the cultures in which the languages are utilized. A high degree of emphasis is placed on providing students with scaffolded opportunities for successfully communicating in the target language. The faculty consistently seeks to connect the language to important issues of culture, as well as foster an environment in which students come to understand the value and relevance of Spanish and/or Chinese to their own lives and future goals.

Falling under the larger goal of helping students develop a sense of global identity, the department adheres to various pragmatic and pedagogical goals that guide the daily rhythm of the language classroom. The four critical language skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening all represent important components of our classrooms and are implemented across the curriculum in developmentally appropriate ways. All four components are covered through a classroom focus on successful communication, an understanding of the importance of the gradual acquisition of grammar, and a continuous increase of the depth and breadth of vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, the department creates opportunities to gain both linguistic and cultural experience firsthand through enrichment and travel abroad opportunities.

Vail Mountain School is pleased to offer the **Seal of Biliteracy**, a credential recognizing students who achieve proficiency in two or more languages by graduation. This seal is awarded to those who meet the standards, providing a diploma endorsement in biliteracy for students proficient in English and at least one additional language. Earning the Seal of Biliteracy not only strengthens students' language abilities but can also open doors to college credit, scholarships, study abroad programs, and expanded career opportunities.

Overview of the Mandarin Curriculum

The Mandarin program is centered around the HSK Curriculum, which is the most widely recognized approach to measuring language proficiency for non-native speakers in China. The current structure for the Mandarin program utilizes a combination of mixed level classes and the opportunity for students to move at different paces through the curriculum. This encourages students to not only ensure they achieve a strong understanding of content, but also to find opportunities to help and learn from their classmates.

The 2024-25 school year is the first year implementing this curriculum across grades 6-12. In the next few years, students should be able to complete the entirety of the first three HSK levels by the end of 12th grade.

While the HSK curriculum represents the central thread of students' progress through their Mandarin studies, there are various other additional aspects of each course that supplement our studies. Due to the tonal nature of Mandarin pronunciation, it is critical to gain significant practice in this area. Students are regularly assigned low stakes/high impact assignments in which they practice listening and speaking skills through recording themselves. All courses also involve

activities such as small group skits, translation practice, speaking activities like “Guess the word,” handwriting practice, etc.

Mandarin I – year course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

The Mandarin I course is specifically designed for students with no previous experience or formal study of Mandarin. This course starts with the absolute basics of the language and gradually progresses through 150 commonly used words that are essential to everyday language use. Basic pronouns, classifiers, nouns, verbs and other parts of speech set students up with a strong foundation in their studies. Students will gain confidence in basic topics such as family, school, dates, times, money, etc. Critical questions words (who, what, when, where, why, how) are introduced in simple dialogs and allow the students to begin using them in conversation. By the end of HSK 1, students will gain a basic understanding of grammatical structures such as negation, past tense/completed action, expressing ability / possibility, and standard ways to ask and respond to basic questions.

Mandarin II – year course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade (9th grade students need teacher approval)

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Mandarin I or equivalent in middle school

Content: Review HSK 1 Lessons 11-15 + HSK 2 Lessons 1-8

The Mandarin II course begins with a quick review of the entirety of HSK 1 content. Students will begin working through the HSK 2 curriculum with the intention of completing at least half of the units. The complexity of the vocabulary and grammar increase at this level and it is critical that students have a solid understanding of foundational knowledge in HSK 1. Students will become familiar with the following topics: talking about time, schedules, and plans; making comparisons and describing possessions; discussing past events and experiences; making shopping choices and expressing preferences; giving reasons and describing changes in state; talking about locations and distances.

Mandarin III – year course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Mandarin II or instructor approval

Content: Review HSK 2 Lessons 1-8 + HSK 2 Lessons 8-15

When students arrive in Mandarin III, they have generally developed a strong ability to communicate in straightforward situations about a variety of everyday topics. More versatile and nuanced grammatical structures allow students to communicate more effectively and also enhance students' abilities to be more creative with the language. Students will develop skills and become more familiar with the following language situations: making suggestions and invitations; expressing past experiences; describing states of being; talking about upcoming events; using comparisons and contrasts in conversation.

Mandarin IV – year course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Mandarin III or instructor approval

Content: Review HSK 2 + HSK 3 Lessons 1-10

Mandarin IV continues to build upon everything students have learned up to this point. Students will begin their study of the HSK 3 content this year. The amount of vocabulary is double that which was studied in the previous two levels and introduces a significant number of new grammatical structures that will position students to communicate more complicated ideas in the target language. By this point in their studies, students will be very familiar with the class protocols and should feel comfortable working through the curriculum at a strong pace. Students often begin taking more risks speaking out and making mistakes at this point in their studies, which allows for robust and engaging conversations. Students will continue to develop more nuanced ways to communicate the following concepts: talking about future plans, invitations, and activities; describing locations, situations, and the state of objects; making comparisons and discussing changes over time; expressing past events, habits, and relationships; using conditionals and making choices; discussing movement, methods of travel, and directions.

Mandarin V – year course

Open to: 11th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Mandarin IV or instructor approval

Content: Review HSK 3 Lessons 1-10 + HSK 3 Lessons 11-20

Mandarin V represents the culmination of everything students have covered during their time studying the language. One of the primary goals of this course is to push students to fully invest in their language studies, take risks, and consider continuing forward at the college level. At this point in their studies, students should feel confident enough to present in front of their students and answer questions from their peers. As we look to finish strong by completing the second half of the HSK 3 curriculum, students will develop deeper skills concerning the following concepts: discussing past actions and recent changes (e.g., using 刚才, 了); expressing handling of objects and results (e.g., 把 + object + verb); describing preferences and making choices (e.g., Question word + 就 + Question word); talking about conditions and results (e.g., 只要...就...); planning trips and events (e.g., using 计划, 是...的); giving invitations and expressing hospitality (e.g., 欢迎 + someone + 来 + place).

Spanish I – year course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: None

Spanish I is an introductory course designed for high school students with little to no prior knowledge of the Spanish language. This course focuses on developing foundational skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish. Students will learn essential vocabulary, basic grammar, and conversational phrases to communicate effectively in everyday situations. In addition, throughout the course, students will explore the rich cultures of Spanish-speaking countries, gaining insight into their customs, traditions, and historical contexts. Interactive activities, including dialogues, role-playing, and cultural projects, will help students build confidence in using Spanish both inside and outside the classroom.

Spanish II – year course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Spanish I course or equivalent in middle school

Spanish II provides an introduction to and review of the basic concepts and vocabulary of the Spanish language, including foundational grammar such as articles and pronouns, adjectives and demonstratives, and conjugations across the present, preterite, imperfect, and progressive tenses. The students will practice and perfect their use of “agreement” in all of their communication in the target language. To encourage risk-taking and ownership of one’s own learning, immersion and class participation is an essential and integral component of daily activities, and the majority of class will be in Spanish. Students will learn through daily conversations, speaking games, grammar practice, videos, music, reading, and much more.

Spanish III – year course

Open to: 9th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Spanish II

Spanish III is an intermediate-level course designed for high school students who have successfully completed Spanish I and II. This course builds on the foundational skills acquired in the previous levels, with a focus on refining language abilities and expanding cultural knowledge. Students will deepen their proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Spanish through more complex grammatical structures, enriched vocabulary, and advanced conversational practice. Students will engage in more sophisticated discussions, write detailed paragraphs, and analyze a variety of authentic texts. Emphasis will be placed on enhancing fluency, accuracy, and comprehension, as well as fostering the ability to express ideas clearly and creatively in Spanish. Through projects, presentations, and interactive activities, students will not only improve their language skills but also develop a deeper appreciation for the diversity and richness of Hispanic cultures. This course is taught entirely in Spanish, following an immersive approach.

Spanish IV – year course

Open to: 10th - 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: Spanish III

The Spanish IV course seeks to expand on the grammar, vocabulary, conversation skills, and cultural themes learned in previous VMS Spanish courses, while engaging students in the

continued practice of the four pillars of traditional language learning—listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Using a wealth of print and digital materials as launching off points, the course will additionally integrate group and individual projects, oral presentations, debates, and other Spanish-language activities to provide a diverse approach to language comprehension and expression. The class will also seek to access the Spanish language through the cultures in which it is spoken, exploring the literature, film, music, history, and other aspects of Spanish-speaking countries across the globe. The class will be taught primarily in Spanish, and students will be expected to use their own Spanish skills during most of their classroom activities. Participation in the target language will be of the utmost importance.

Advanced Spanish through Service Learning – year course

Open to: 11 or 12th grade

Prerequisites: Completion of Spanish IV, AP Spanish, or approval from the Department Chair.

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

This immersive, advanced-level Spanish course integrates language acquisition with meaningful community engagement. Designed for students who are passionate about using their Spanish skills to make a positive impact in our own community, the course combines academic study with hands-on service learning opportunities in Spanish-speaking communities. Students will deepen their proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing through real-world applications, such as mentoring, translating, tutoring, and organizing culturally relevant activities with the Spanish-speaking communities of the Vail Valley. We will explore themes such as education and literacy, healthcare and accessibility, immigration and identity, economic empowerment, and cultural identity. Emphasis is placed on reflective learning, fostering critical thinking about the role of language and culture in building relationships, and addressing societal challenges. Students will document their experiences through journals, presentations, and collaborative projects, cultivating both linguistic fluency and a profound understanding of the communities they serve. This course empowers students to become global citizens, using Spanish to bridge cultural divides and contribute meaningfully to the world around them. This course is taught entirely in Spanish, following an immersive approach.

AP Spanish Language & Culture – year course

Open to: 12th grade

Meetings per ten-day rotation: Five 80 minute periods

Prerequisites: A- or higher in Spanish IV, current teacher signature, Department Chair signature upon consideration of application and completion of summer assignment

The AP Spanish Language and Culture class is a rigorous course taught exclusively in Spanish that requires students to improve their proficiency across the three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. The course focuses on the integration of authentic cultural resources including online print, audio, and audiovisual resources, as well as traditional print resources that include literature, essays, magazines, and newspaper articles, with the goal of providing a rich, diverse learning experience. Students are expected to communicate using advanced vocabulary and linguistic structures as they build proficiency in all modes of communication and prepare for the content and format of the AP exam in May.

Athletics

Athletics and physical conditioning are considered essential components of a well-rounded VMS experience. Therefore, Upper School students must fulfill a physical fitness requirement by participating in one sport for one of the seasons. This can be accomplished by involvement in an interscholastic sport or fitness activity approved by the Athletic Director. Please note that the VMS athletics offerings below are subject to change.

Fall

- Boys Development & Varsity Soccer
- Girls Development & Varsity Volleyball
- Boys Development & Varsity Golf
- Fitness Class
- Climbing Club

Winter

- Boys Development and Varsity Basketball
- Girls Varsity Basketball
- Boys & Girls Alpine Skiing
- Boys & Girls Telemark Skiing
- Boys & Girls Nordic Skiing
- Boys & Girls Competitive Climbing Team

Spring

- Girls Development & Varsity Soccer
- Boys Development & Varsity Lacrosse
- Fitness Class
- Climbing Club

Participation in other interscholastic sports VMS does not offer, such as cross country, football, hockey, boys volleyball, baseball, girls tennis, girls lacrosse, boys tennis, swimming, dance, cheer, or track and field, may be arranged by the Athletic Director as available through partner schools.

Athletes who specialize in a non-CHSAA sport/activity such as dance, horseback riding, figure skating, club skiing, etc., may obtain an athletic waiver from the athletic department.

Sports Eligibility Policy

A policy monitoring student athletes' performance is meant to encourage them to participate in athletics while reaching their potential academically. Student-athlete grades are monitored every two weeks throughout the season. When a student's grade drops below 70%, the student is placed on the "warning track" and asked to address this concern immediately. Parents, students, and teachers are notified. After two weeks, if the student has improved the grade, the student is no longer on the warning track. Student-athletes who have not improved their grade are required to meet with the teacher, Division Director and Athletic Director. At that time, students may be prohibited from practicing, attending, traveling to, or participating in games/matches/competitions.

Students who do not attend school for at least half the academic day are not eligible to compete in interscholastic competitions on that date, except by permission of both the Division Director and the Athletic Director.

Additional Classes

Ethics Courses

All Upper School students will take classes that examine the ethics beyond the demands of the academic day. These classes are offered to teach students real-life skills and knowledge and to consider the ethical dilemmas one faces in everything from finance to time management. Ethics courses are targeted for students' developmental needs and last one semester.

Ninth grade students will take a full semester of the Ethics of Relationships and Sexuality and another full semester of Digital Ethics. Both courses examine the decision students are faced with in personal relationships that play out online and in person.

In tenth grade, students are again exposed to real-world ethical dilemmas. In one semester, they will explore Environmental Ethics, examining water, waste, and air quality, specifically using the local environment and entities to better understand how limited resources are used in the Valley and state. During the opposite semester, students in 10th grade will explore life skills, like cooking, vehicle maintenance, grocery shopping, and consumer economics in Ethics and Society.

Students in 11th grade will work on mindfulness and meditation collaborating with outside practitioners to coach them through intensive self-care techniques in a course titled Ethics of the Mindful Individual. During the opposite semester, 11th grade students participate in a Diversity and Equity seminar, learning about equity and justice in today's society.

In a course titled Living Ethically Beyond Graduation, 12th grade students explore a senior seminar of sorts, where they meet members of our community to learn about life after Vail Mountain School. Seniors learn about campus resources, how to interact with their professors and what their rights and responsibilities are once they turn eighteen. In past years, seniors have learned from VMS alumni about college and life experiences.

Intraterm – *week-long program*

Intraterm is a week-long program led by faculty and staff during which all 9th-12th grade students choose a course of study designed to enrich the traditional curriculum and the student's intellectual curiosity. Course titles from previous years include: The Ethical Dilemmas of a Resource Rich State, the study of Texas; Wolves in Yellowstone; Avalanche Level One Course Certification; Costa Rica Spanish Language Immersion; Water, Wilderness and Conservation; Psychology and Film; Marine Science in Baja Mexico.

Senior Project – *2nd semester of senior year*

All seniors will participate in a one-semester capstone project during the second semester of their senior year. Senior Project is a graduation requirement. A true experience in project-based learning, Senior Project is a seminar style class where seniors will collaborate with small cohorts to ideate, create, research, prototype, exhibit, write, and present.

For the second semester, seniors will continue their yearlong studies in mathematics, science and world language (or Music Theory). They will replace their history and English class with their project process as well as take a one-semester humanities course.

During the second semester, students are encouraged to follow their interests and passions by studying a topic of choice. Through research, reading scholarly sources, working with experts, and building a large annotated bibliography, student gain information about their chosen topic. Shadow

days, expert interviews, and internships will play a role in the projects. Real-life, authentic learning opportunities will be integrated into all projects.

All seniors have the opportunity to earn an honors designation for their Senior Projects. Honors designations for Senior Projects are awarded after project completion, during Class Night in late May.

In order to achieve an honors designation, a Senior Project must meet the following minimum requirements:

- Evidence of a strong, consistent relationship with a project mentor/outside advisor, inclusive of 6+ hours of meaningful internship experience, job shadowing, or real-world mentoring during the spring semester
- Evidence of curated feedback from a professional in one's field of study on a student's research and annotated bibliography
- Assessment scores of 90% or above on all major project components: annotated bibliography, writing portfolio, product, presentation, oral defense
- Evidence that the student received iterative feedback on product from multiple constituencies outside VMS
- Demonstration of ethical leadership and active engagement in cohort model with peers and teachers

FAQs About Course Registration

What does "rank your choices" mean?

Our scheduling software needs to know your choice ranking in order to place you in the classes you prefer. You may rank up to the maximum number listed under each department.

Can I take both Mandarin and Spanish?

Unfortunately, there is not enough room in the Upper School schedule to add an additional core class.

What if I'm the only one to select a certain class?

Class offerings are dependent on interest. Under-enrolled classes may be canceled.

I only see semester-long Visual and Performing Arts classes.

Performing and Visual Arts classes will all be a semester in length, meeting for four 100-minute periods over the course of the ten-day rotation (for 10-12th graders). Read the course description carefully, as some arts courses, like Advanced Portfolio Development and Theatre, may require more time than is assigned in the academic day. Students are expected to complete one semester of arts during the year, as a minimum. Students may elect to take arts both semesters. Visual Arts, Performing Arts, and Technology Courses are graded and contribute to a student's GPA.

If my course of choice is full, do I get first pick next term?

We will do our best to place you in your first-choice classes. If courses are full, we begin a formal waitlist in case a spot becomes available. Some classes may be canceled due to low class numbers.

Which courses have expectations/assignments over the summer?

All AP and many advanced classes will have a summer assignment. All Upper School English courses assign summer reading as well. Students are expected to complete their summer assignments in full before Orientation in August.

Is there a minimum or maximum number of free periods I can have in any given term?

The number of free periods varies by grade and by arts choices. Typically, 9th grade students will have proctored study halls, and all 10-12th grade students may have one free period during the semester if they do not take an Arts course.

Where can I find another copy of the Curriculum Guide if I lose it?

This year's Curriculum Guide can be found on the Veracross Student Portal.

I'm going into 12th grade, do I have to sign up for a Senior Project?

All seniors will take part in a Senior Project during the second semester of their last year at VMS. Seniors' class schedules will be altered to allow for independent research and real-world opportunities. They will meet as a cohort to work on project ideation, research, writing, identifying outside advisories, creating products, planning for oral defense and preparing for their final celebratory presentation etc. Seniors will also be assigned to a Humanities Capstone course in the second semester of their senior year.

What if I feel it is important to take more than three AP courses a year?

Please make an appointment with the Upper School Division Director and the College Counselor to discuss taking more than three AP courses in a year.

I'm going to be a 9th grade student, do I have to sign up for arts?

If you are a 9th grade student, you are required to take two of three art offerings. Each course is one semester in length, thus you can only choose two. You may not choose the same two classes. Your choices are Foundation Studio (Visual Arts), Theatre Appreciation, or Computer Science. If a ninth grader performs academically in the first semester, they will have an opportunity to audition for the Upper School musical for the second semester.

The curriculum options look interesting. What will be the considerations for granting 1st or 2nd choices to students? Will seniors be given priority?

Our goal is to give everyone their first choice, and we will work very hard to do so. The rankings provide alternatives so that if courses conflict or do not have enough sign-ups, we have some options for students. It is less about priority and more about providing flexibility in creating the schedule.