



THADEN SCHOOL

Intensives Course Offerings

Upper School
Academic Year 2025-26

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Letter From the Head of School

Thaden Families,

Our faculty members have worked creatively and collaboratively to prepare a compelling set of Intensive course offerings for our Upper School students in May 2026. As you will see, our academic program's pathways are incredibly robust, providing interesting, engaging, and challenging opportunities for students to pursue interests and develop passions across all disciplines.

These pathways, varied as they are, lead to a common goal: independence. Whether students are reading "Macbeth," exploring the culinary and cultural roots of the American South, testing the laws of physics, or writing and staging a one-act play, they are learning to think, speak, and act for themselves. At its core, a Thaden education is designed to cultivate the critical thinking skills our students need to become discerning consumers of information and citizens with courage in their convictions, built on free inquiry and civil debate.

Of course, the strength of a Thaden education ultimately resides in the quality of the faculty members who ignite in our students a passion for discovery and lifelong learning. Our students thrive under the guidance of exceptional educators recruited from across the United States and many parts of the world.

Thaden is creating the next generation of leaders to be dynamic, innovative problem solvers through a challenging educational experience grounded in critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world application.

Michael Maloy
Head of School

Mission and Guiding Principles

Our mission is to provide a balanced and challenging education that ignites in our students a passion for discovery and learning, prepares them to succeed in college, and inspires them to lead lives of integrity, purpose, and responsible global citizenship.

In pursuing our mission, we are guided by these principles:

- The diversity of a school is essential to the quality of education that it provides.
- In a small school, students are better able to form close relationships with teachers that will give them a strong sense of belonging, self-confidence, and responsibility.
- There is an art in masterful teaching, which requires resources, mentorship, and recognition.
- A well-balanced curriculum empowers students:
 - To think ethically, critically, and creatively about global issues and their local manifestations;
 - To see connections among the humanities, sciences, and mathematics as integrative disciplines in the search for knowledge, meaning, and beauty;
 - To build coherent, compelling, and innovative arguments;
 - To establish their voice in the world by writing and speaking well and expressing themselves creatively;
 - To work independently and collaboratively.
- Activities outside of the classroom (such as acting in a play, competing on a team, or working on a sustainability project) give students essential opportunities to develop as leaders, volunteers, and contributors to the life and spirit of the greater community.
- A school must create a safe and healthy environment where students have time and space for reflection, freedom to make important decisions, and opportunities to learn from mistakes.
- The harmony of a school community depends on a shared commitment to honesty, compassion, and fair play.

Overview

Intensives are one- or two-week periods of study in which students eschew their regular weekly schedule to participate in one course that allows students to engage in educational experiences that are not always easily facilitated during our typical 60- and 90-minute class periods. Intensives also allow for the development of creative interdisciplinary course offerings that are complementary to but distinct from Thaden's core curriculum.

Intensives leverage the special interests and expertise of our nationally recruited faculty by giving them considerable discretion in the design of their courses. The Intensive course offerings represent our faculty's passion, creativity, and interdisciplinarity. Similarly, throughout Intensives faculty use a wide range of pedagogical methods – from seminar-style discussions to hands-on activities – that collectively enhance students' versatility as problem solvers who can work creatively and collaboratively in a rapidly changing world.

Students in Grades 9 to 11 must enroll in either one two-week Intensive course or two one-week Intensive courses. Several courses involve travel and require overnight stays for one or more days. These courses are clearly marked in the course offering guide. Please pay attention to these designations when considering your selections.

Intensive courses carry academic credit. A one-week Intensive course carries $\frac{1}{3}$ credit and a two-week Intensive course carries $\frac{2}{3}$ credit. All Intensive courses are graded on a Pass/No Credit basis, and credit earned during Intensives can be used to fulfill graduation requirements in Community-Based Learning (CBL), Signature Programs, Visual and Performing Arts, and Additional Courses.

Note: Intensives are credit-bearing courses and a required part of Thaden's academic program. Students who are absent during Intensives should expect to make up missed work, and extended unexcused absences may result in not receiving credit.

Graduation Requirements

Thaden School's graduation requirements ensure that all students build a strong and balanced foundation, while also offering freedom to explore and develop a wide range of interests.

Program	Credits	Notes
English	4.5	The required sequence in Grades 9-12 (English I, II, III, IV, and Professional Communication) fulfills this four-and-a-half-credit requirement.
Mathematics and Computer Science	4	The required sequence in Grades 9-11 (Algebra I-II and Geometry) fulfills three credits of this four-credit requirement. Algebra I taken in Middle School counts as one Upper School math credit.
History and Social Sciences	3	The required sequence in Grades 9-11 (Modern World History, US Government and Economics, US History) fulfills this three-credit requirement.
Science	3	The required sequence in Grades 9-10 (Inquiries in Biological and Environmental Sciences, Inquiries in Chemical and Physical Sciences) and one additional year-long course fulfills this three-credit requirement.
World Languages and Cultures	3	Students must study the same language for at least two consecutive years in the Upper School. World language study in Middle School may count for up to one credit.
Signature Programs	2	Students may choose elective courses in three areas: Meals, Reels, and Wheels.
Visual and Performing Arts	2	Students may choose elective courses in three areas: music, theater, and visual arts.
Wellness and Physical Education	2	Students in Grades 9 and 11 are required to take a one-trimester Wellness course. Students must earn one Physical Education (PE) credit each year in the Upper School by taking a one-trimester PE elective or by participating on a Thaden athletics team.
Additional Courses	3	This requirement may be fulfilled by taking elective courses in any field of study at Thaden School.
Total	26.5	As a general matter, students are expected to take seven courses per trimester.
While fulfilling these requirements, students must also take at least three courses that carry the Community-Based Learning (CBL) designation. In most cases, one credit equals three trimesters of study. The number of credits required represent the minimum that a student must earn to fulfill that requirement. Thaden School's graduation requirements exceed Arkansas state standards.		

One-Week Courses

Each of the following courses meets for one week and earns $\frac{1}{3}$ credit.

Birding

There are so many reasons to become a birder! For one, they are literally everywhere we go from forests, lakes, cities, and deserts to our own backyards. Of all the wildlife on our planet, birds are – wings down – the most accessible. With their beautiful songs, soaring flights, and shimmering feathers, birds delight our senses with beauty. And if that isn't enough, birding is a lifelong, low-tech, outdoor pursuit that brings a lot of bang for very little buck. There is a reason 96,000,000 Americans consider themselves birders!

This one-week Intensive focuses on bird biology, bird identification, creating habitat for native birds, and building skills as birders in the field. Birding is perfect for anyone who is curious about nature and enjoys spending quiet time outdoors. Do keep this in mind: bird watching involves being very still and very quiet for lengthy periods of time.

$\frac{1}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses

Dollars and Sense

This one-week Intensive covers the essentials of managing money and making informed financial decisions. Students learn practical skills that apply directly to their lives, such as creating a budget, understanding how bank accounts and credit work, and setting savings goals. This course also covers the basics of investing, the importance of credit scores, and how to avoid debt traps. Real-world examples and activities help students connect financial concepts to everyday situations, like paying for college, buying a car, or planning for the future. Finish the week with a toolkit of strategies for making smart money choices, building financial independence, and preparing for long-term goals.

$\frac{1}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses

Dopamine Dressing: The Neuroscience of Fashion

Have you ever noticed how a color, pattern, or texture can instantly change your mood? In this one-week hands-on Intensive, students explore the science behind why that happens. Learn how the brain perceives color, interprets patterns, and responds with dopamine, then put that science into action by creating outfits that spark joy and reflect who you are. Using a Thaden t-shirt as a starting point, students will experiment with colors, textures, and patterns through thrift shop finds, mood boards, and hands-on labs. The course culminates in a showcase of each student's signature ensemble, along with an explanation of how each choice connects to neurotransmitters, dopamine pathways, and emotional responses.

$\frac{1}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses

Haunted Arkansas

This one-week Intensive explores some of the more famous haunted sites in Arkansas. We share our own ghost stories, hear from ghost hunters, mystics, and researchers about the history and science (yes, science) behind hauntings. We look into how and why ghost stories are created and shared across generations and how different cultures and religions embrace or fear the idea of ghosts. Students begin with a ghost story, either a personal one, a local one, or a cultural one. An overnight stay at “America’s Most Haunted Hotel,” the Crescent Hotel in Eureka Springs, immerses students in the atmosphere that gives ghost stories their power. Over the course of the week, students use different tools and experiences to examine the origins of their chosen story and rethink it from multiple lenses to be able to tell the story again from a broader perspective.

This course features a required overnight experience.

½ credit, Additional Courses

Service to Humanity (CBL)

Do you have a strong desire to serve? Have you heard or witnessed the joy from those who serve around you? Why do those who serve typically have a positive look on life? What does humanity mean?

According to Dr. Balamurali Balaji, a Mahatma Gandhi scholar, “Humanity is not about maintaining a gracious relationship between one another in the society but it is about building a bond amongst the society with the help of sustainable values. Humanity is not about showing passion and empathy to each other at times of need but about regarding love in high esteem and kindness in all walks of life. Humanity is not just a word for symbolizing human compassion and civilization but it goes beyond the horizons of human nature and his creations. It is all about using hearts along with the minds in all the endeavors of humankind.”

In this one-week Intensive, students serve in different charitable organizations in and around Bentonville. Each organization has a specific target audience. Students learn about the missions of chosen organizations and spend time in person helping out however needed. Students reflect on their experiences with the shared goal of building kind hearts, empathy, and leadership skills through service.

½ credit, Additional Courses, Community-Based Learning

Sport and Spectacle: Gladiators from Ancient Rome to American Arenas

Gladiatorial combat and training have ignited curiosity and spoken to the imagination since Roman antiquity. Many Roman gladiators were professional athletes and entertainers focused on earning fame and glory. These elite athletes had the best doctors and trainers, and their fitness level and nutrition were carefully monitored – the more popular the gladiator, the more intense the training. Today, the idea of “gladiators,” powerful fighters engaged in combat for an audience, spans a wide range, from primarily entertainment (Spartacus, Gladiator, Hunger Games, Professional Wrestling) to dangerous encounters (boxers, UFC’s modern-day gladiators), and even fitness (CrossFit, MMA) and Halloween

costumes. Why does the gladiator continue to occupy a place in our shared cultural imagination in modern America? Why do we perform combat for entertainment? Why has it remained so popular?

This one-week Intensive explores questions such as these. Our exploration of gladiators and performance remains limited to history or culture. We devote a significant part of our mornings to an updated version of the gladiator training experience. We dive into rigorous conditioning, practice modernized close-range strikes, and train hands-on like a gladiator (or a modern-day elite athlete). Meanwhile, in the afternoons, we explore modern versions of gladiatorial spectacle – considering the line between economics and exploitation, the role of audiences, and the larger cultural significance of engaging in combat as performance and turning violence into spectacle. As a deliverable, students choose either to create a historically informed but modern gladiatorial fitness routine or to research, assess, and create a presentation on a gladiator-inspired piece of modern culture such as Hunger Games or UFC.

1/3 credit, Additional Courses

Two-Week Courses

Each of the following courses meets for two weeks and earns $\frac{2}{3}$ credit.

Note that designated courses feature a required overnight experience.

The Art of Museum Curation

This two-week Intensive introduces students to the aesthetic, ethical, and practical considerations of displaying works of art for public audiences in the 21st century. Students visit Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, The Momentary, and the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa to experience three different types of museum environments; speak with and learn from curators working in major American institutions today; and explore the latest scholarly work on the theory and practice of museum curation. Topics such as the repatriation of art and artifacts, the science and art of conservation, the technology and engineering that make mounting varied works possible, and making old art relevant for contemporary audiences drive discussions in and outside of the classroom and inspire students during the creation of their final project: a full proposal for a museum exhibition, including a scale mock-up.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit, Visual and Performing Arts

Equine Immersion

This two-week Intensive offers students an in-depth exploration of horsemanship, horse therapy, and ranching. By combining immersive experiences, workshops, and excursions, students gain profound insights into the significance of horses in different cultures, acquire practical horsemanship skills, and discover the therapeutic power of working with horses. Students also learn about the fundamentals of ranching and its role in sustaining equine heritage. Students present their findings either through art, infographics, or other media sharing the importance of horses in society and the connection people can have with a horse.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses

Geometry in Construction (GeoCon)

In this two-week Intensive, students explore the uses of geometry and other mathematics in construction. The course directly answers the question "When will I use this math?" Ditch the abstract formulas and build something real; dive into geometry and other essential mathematics by applying them directly to real-world construction challenges. Students spend time working with their hands, learning to safely and effectively use real carpentry and construction tools while developing crucial team-building and interpersonal skills and managing projects. This course allows students to collaborate to create lasting structures and functional items that remain on campus for the entire school community to use and admire for years to come, giving students the chance to leave a permanent, tangible legacy while mastering practical, in-demand skills.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses

Little Thaden on the Prairie

What was it really like to grow up on the frontier, and how much of what we think we know comes from Laura Ingalls Wilder's imagination? In this two-week Intensive, we'll step inside the world of Little House on the Prairie to explore the real lives of frontier families, the survival skills they relied on, and the stories they told to make sense of it all. Together, we'll churn butter, try our hand at quilting, and examine historical documents alongside excerpts from Wilder's books to separate myth from reality. We'll explore how Wilder's own life, the culture of the Ozarks, and the pressures of her time shaped her storytelling – and how those stories helped build a lasting (and oftentimes misleading) vision of the American West.

Our adventures take us beyond the classroom: an overnight visit to the Rocky Ridge Farmhouse, where Wilder wrote her books, and the Ozarks Cultural Center provide a better understanding of the traditions, crafts, and community life that defined the region. Along the way, we ask big questions about the family's relationship to the land, the challenges and opportunities they faced, and their fraught interactions with the Indigenous People on whose land they settled. We also connect the past to the present, examining today's homesteading revival, the rise of prairie-core aesthetics, and the genre of autofiction. Why do stories like Wilder's still resonate so deeply, and how can we tell our own?

This course features a required overnight experience.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses

Seeking Refuge: Understanding the Refugee Experience in America (CBL)

This two-week Intensive provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the refugee crisis in the United States. Explore the full process of gaining refugee status, including displacement, life in refugee camps, and the interview and selection procedures required for resettlement in the United States.

This course examines how various organizations assist refugees after arrival, including support with housing, employment, language-learning, enrolling children in school, and adjusting to life in a new country. Students also explore common misinformation about refugees and the differences between refugees and immigrants. Additionally, the course addresses how the political climate in the United States has affected both current refugees and those seeking resettlement. Partnerships with local nonprofit organizations Canopy of Northwest Arkansas and Clothed with Compassion allow students to engage directly with refugee support work in their local community.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit Additional Courses, Community-Based Learning

Sonic Sculptures

In this STEAM-focused, two-week Intensive, students explore the world of interactive artworks designed to come alive through sound when touched, moved, or engaged. Study contemporary and historical artists who merge sculpture, technology, and sound to create immersive experiences. Alongside this artistic exploration, students investigate the physics of sound, discovering how vibration,

resonance, and materials affect tone and pitch. Through hands-on activities inspired by instrument-making – including examining examples from strings, woodwinds, brass, and percussion to understand their physical anatomy and design principles – students gain a deeper understanding of how sound behaves and how structure and form influence what we hear. Students experiment with different construction methods, materials, and simple sound-making devices to create their own interactive sculptures. By the end of the course, each student designs and presents an original sound-producing artwork that combines creativity, craftsmanship, and interactivity.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit, Visual and Performing Arts

Thaden Shark Tank

Northwest Arkansas is an innovation hub where global brands and scrappy startups thrive side-by-side. In this two-week Intensive, students step into the entrepreneurial world through touring local businesses; learning about budgeting, marketing, and branding basics; and ultimately designing their own ventures. Working in teams, students create and pitch their own business or product to a panel of local venture capitalists and entrepreneurs in a Shark Tank-style showcase.

$\frac{2}{3}$ credit, Additional Courses
