

ACADEMICS

SELECTING YOUR FUTURE

How to choose classes:

by Trevor Gates

If you have come to this article in order to gain further knowledge that will better your ability to make the correct and most beneficial choices in selecting your class schedule, then you have come to the right place.

ENGLISH

The first subject to discuss is one that requires four years as a prerequisite to graduate—English. The only choice one has in the English classes being offered, for the most part, is whether to take Honors (9th & 10th), Advanced Placement (A.P. for 11th & 12th), or the regular English class. Obviously if English is enjoyable in one's eyes, it is a sure thing that Honors and A.P.



Junior A.P. English teacher, Mrs. Karlin teaches a challenging course.

English are in his or her future - but be prepared for a challenging class that forces one to read in order to keep pace. More importantly, however, they do prepare someone very well for college-level English classes, as well as looking excellent on his or her future transcripts, so the reward of excelling is

very high. All English classes read a variety of novels in class, are tested on vocabulary words, learn proper English grammar and write a variety of essays, poems and reports. For an elective, consider writing for the school newspaper or a take creative writing class.

RELIGION

There is not any choice in religion classes since the freshman or sophomore courses are required. Freshmen study Introduction to Catholicism and Sacraments. Sophomores learn about Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Scriptures. These classes engage students in interesting discussions, they study stories from the bible and activities assist students in understanding their faith traditions.

As a junior or senior, however, there are many choices. The choices are as follows: Prayer and Spirituality, Faith and Justice, Faith in Action, World Religions, Marriage and Family, and Advanced Theology and Ethics.

Most of these classes are pretty self-explanatory in their name, but this still poses the problem of choosing if one is not too sure which route to take in expanding their religious knowledge. The most popular classes taken as a junior is that of Faith and Justice and World Religions, while Marriage and Family and either Prayer and Spirituality or Advanced Theology and Ethics are the most popular as a senior.

World Religions does just what it sounds like, addresses the many different religions

present in our world today. It moves at a fairly quick pace discussing the highlights of each religion and pointing out the similarities and differences amongst them.

Prayer and Spirituality requires one to delve into their own prayer habits, or lack there of in some cases. Faith and Justice will challenge one to apply basic Christian principles to problems such as poverty, hunger, crime, et cetera.

Lastly, and the most difficult religion class offered is Advanced Theology and Ethics. There is a reason it is only offered as a senior course because it greatly challenges past beliefs and forces one to dissect all that he or she believes in the hope of establishing much firmer beliefs. This class is highly recommended but be prepared to challenge everything learned in the past

HISTORY

The next requirement is that of the history department. Similar to the first couple years of religion, there is no choice in the first three years of history classes. All freshmen take Global Studies. Sophomores take Modern History and Government. Juniors take U.S. History.

After junior year and experiencing a history class with Mr. McQueen, who this writer knows as "the greatest history teacher west of the Mississippi", one may be scared to experience the difficulty of which senior history class to take for that extra half-year credit required. On the contrary, however, one may be very excited to spend another semester with this great man. It is highly encouraged to take an extra, full year of history if it fits in one's schedule, but if it does not than the choice becomes whether to take American Civil War, World War II, or Vietnam Studies—all of these being with Mr. McQueen. Or consider taking Sociology, Psychology, or Economics with a different teacher such as Mrs. Lynch or Dr. White.



Union soldier Mr. McQueen enlists student for Civil War

SCIENCE AND MATH

Science and Math are the next two major dilemmas in schedule planning. Only three years of each are required, but before continuing on this section of the article, know that many colleges love students taking these for all four years, and undoubtedly the more prestigious ones almost require it when considering admission. This is especially true when it comes to math and it is highly encouraged to take a course every year at the high school and also to explore the Honors and Advanced Placement Math classes. The sequence of math classes is Algebra, Honors or regular Geometry, Advance or regular

Algebra II, Advanced or regular Pre-Calculus, and AP Calculus. Mr. Johnson encourages math students to complete in yearly math competitions and Valley students have placed exceptionally well at these competitions.

When it comes to choosing which science classes to take, take two of the three available—Biology, Chemistry, and Physics—freshman and sophomore year, and "save" the third available science class for junior year. This presents the opportunity of taking the available Advanced Placement class for that junior-year subject the following year—senior year. This allows the chance of getting college credit while looking great on college transcripts. The additional benefits that occur from this approach is for example: taking a Conceptual Physics class freshman year, followed by Biology then possibly Chemistry or vice versa than attempting to take A.P. Physics senior year will make it much more difficult as many of the concepts learned from one's freshman year would be forgotten three years later.

COMPUTERS AND P.E.

The next subject addressed will be that of whether to take certain classes or opt to wave them—such as with Computers or Physical Education. If athletics have always been a part of one's life than it is an easy decision with regards to P.E. A semester of Physical Education can be waived after participating in two consecutive years of a sport. If athletics have not been a part of one's life, it is still encouraged to attempt a sport for a couple years and who knows, it may be the best choice ever made, and saves taking a semester of P.E.

As for computers, it is more difficult to waive a half-credit of Computers but if computers have always been a part of one's life - than this waiver test should be a walk in the park for those gifted young ladies and gentlemen. Take the required Computer Applications course during your freshmen year. Other computer electives include Yearbook, Newspaper/Web design, Graphic Design and Digital Video Production.

FINE ARTS

All students are required to take one full year of Fine Arts credit. This can be accomplished by participating in one of our fine ensembles: choir, orchestra, band or jazz band. If the dramatic flair is more your style, consider Drama I, II or III. If you are more artistic than you should sign up for Art I or challenge yourself in sculpture or Advanced Art.



The VCS Orchestra is quite impressive!!!