BARD HIGH SCHOOL EARLY COLLEGE
ENGAGING STUDENTS IN THE LIBERAL ARTS

BHSEC BEST PRACTICES: The BHSEC Curriculum

About BHSEC

Premised on the belief that many adolescents are ready and eager for greater challenge, Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) seeks to provide bright, highly motivated, and diverse students with an intellectually engaging four-year academic program that includes a two-year college liberal arts degree. Students graduate prepared to take upper level college courses, earn a baccalaureate degree, develop successful careers, and contribute to society. First developed in 2001 as a partnership between Bard College and the New York City Department of Education, four BHSEC schools currently operate: BHSEC Manhattan, BHSEC Queens (2008), BHSEC Newark (2011), developed by Bard College and the Newark Public Schools, and most recently, BHSEC Cleveland, opened in August 2014 in partnership with the Cleveland Metropolitan School District.

The BHSEC schools immerse students in the traditions and practices associated with a liberal arts college education. Students take high school courses for two years, and then engage in a full college-level course of studies in the eleventh and twelfth grade, often graduating high school with an Associate in Arts degree from Bard College. With a faculty of highly qualified scholars and artists that teach both high school and college courses, BHSEC aspires to impart higher-level thinking skills through analytic writing, focused discussion, and in-depth inquiry.

After four years at BHSEC, the majority (85-92%) of students graduate with a Bard College Associate in Arts degree in the liberal arts and sciences and 60 transferrable college credits. Typically, 98% of BHSEC Manhattan and Queens students receive a New York State Regents high school diploma. (BHSEC Newark and BHSEC Cleveland are too new to have historical data regarding high school and college graduation rates.) More than 97% of BHSEC students continue their studies at a four-year college and 94% complete a bachelor’s degree.

To help others understand the design underlying the success of Bard High School Early College schools and students, the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST) at Teachers College, Columbia University, undertook a study of several of BHSEC’s key practices. This series of seven reports provides insights into how these practices are implemented at BHSEC and how they could be replicated by other institutions and organizations.

The BHSEC curriculum is the seventh practice to be examined. For this study, researchers conducted a series of interviews with administrators from Bard College and BHSEC schools. We also observed classrooms, analyzed key documents, and reviewed relevant research literature. A detailed examination of the BHSEC curriculum follows.
About Curriculum

Early colleges provide young students with an introduction to college level content; at BHSEC, this means an exposure to the rigorous Bard College liberal arts curriculum. A liberal arts education provides a broad educational base that can create well-rounded youth who are knowledgeable, skilled, and open to diverse ideas and perspectives. This content enhances students’ ability to learn, work and be productive citizens in their adult life. Seifert, Goodman, Lindsay, Jorgenson, Wolniak, Pascarella and Blaich (2008) found that, net of background characteristics, college experiences or practices, a liberal arts education had a positive impact on the following learning outcomes: intercultural effectiveness, inclination to inquire, lifelong learning, well-being, and leadership. Bonvillian and Murphy (1996) posit that liberal arts colleges benefit their students by providing an interdisciplinary education in historic ideals, morals, devotion to quality, and a clear and direct vision of the future.

In addition, research suggests that certain curricular characteristics improve student learning. Lecompte (2003) described four curricular standards that have been found to raise student achievement: rigor that maximizes student potential, expansion of the mind through critical thinking, diversity and appreciation for difference and individuality, and the acquisition of real world skills. Van Tassel and Baska (2003) describe curricular qualities and classroom practices that facilitate learning including: inquiry-based learning, questioning, creative problem solving, and problem-based learning. Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) found that discussion-based learning can accelerate comprehension of difficult material in middle and high school students. The BHSEC curriculum emphasizes content and practices that have been identified as benefitting students in the empirical literature.

The History of the BHSEC Curriculum

*High school students should encounter something that challenges the tendency to conform and that is foreign and strange to themselves.*

*President Botstein, Jefferson’s Children, p. 119*

*[We believe in] honoring teens’ cognitive and socio-emotional realities and the diversity of those realities. But even more, it means embracing those realities as rich with intellectual possibility rather than as burdens to be borne.*

*Library Director, Social Studies faculty, BHSEC Manhattan*

The curriculum for BHSEC was modeled after that of Bard College at Simon’s Rock, a residential school located in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. Simon’s Rock was established in 1964 by Elizabeth Hall, who felt that the latter two years of high school were often wasted and that adolescents would benefit from engaging in more challenging work. The next President of Simon’s Rock, Baird Whitlock, pioneered the use of a fixed curriculum and believed that students should begin college level work at the age of 15 or 16. Bard College merged with Simon’s Rock in 1979 to create Bard College at Simon’s Rock.
The long-time president of Bard College, Dr. Leon Botstein, is a strong believer in the educational model developed by Hall and Whitlock. Botstein felt that colleges often spend a great deal of time making up for poor middle and high school education. He described his concerns about public high schools in a book that caught the eye of the former New York City Schools chancellor Harold Levy. Levy reached out to President Botstein in 2001 and asked him to create an early college high school in Manhattan. Bard College recruited several key faculty from Simon’s Rock to plan and open the new early college high school in New York City and develop its curricular model. President Botstein thought the Associates degree requirements at Simon’s Rock were a good starting place for the BHSEC curriculum, but advocated for greater challenge in the BHSEC curriculum.

The BHSEC schools established in the subsequent years have followed a similar plan, varying the curriculum somewhat to align with state and local requirements, student needs, and faculty interests.

**The Logic of the BHSEC Curriculum**

The BHSEC curriculum is divided into two segments. During 9th and 10th grade, students engage exclusively in high school coursework. These courses are taught by BHSEC’s college faculty and integrate many of the instructional practices that students will encounter in their college years. Years 1 and 2 of the curriculum correspond to 11th and 12th grade, and reflect a fully collegiate curriculum. More electives are available during the two college years than in 9th and 10th grade, allowing students to pursue their interests. Students take courses that will allow them to complete a Bard College Associates degree as well as to meet the high school graduation requirements of their states and districts.

The BHSEC curriculum is designed to insure student success in further postsecondary studies and provides a well-balanced set of courses in literature, the humanities, science, history, math, foreign languages and the arts. In their years at BHSEC, students are prepared for college both academically and behaviorally. Students learn how to manage their time, write effectively, collaborate with others, and reflect on their own learning, skills that are needed for postsecondary success (Conley, Aspengren, Stout, & Veach, 2006). The BHSEC curriculum is typically delivered as it is in a liberal arts college, in a seminar style classroom that facilitates discussion-based learning. Most classes span two periods and do not meet every day, to give students longer course sessions and schedules like those found at a college.

People assume that BHSEC students are missing core content areas because they finish their high school course work in only two years. The Dean of Studies notes that “they are not skipping two years; they are taking a different approach. They still don’t graduate until they’ve done four years, but the last two years are a much deeper experience.”

There are several core principles underlying the BHSEC curriculum. One such principle is that students must struggle with difficult texts and stretch the limits of their knowledge and understanding. President Botstein notes that texts should be selected that “honor students’ capacity to do serious work.” Secondly, there is an emphasis on depth over breadth. The Dean of Studies at BHSEC Newark notes that “students are not going to read a large array of books,
but they will really digest and understand the books that they do read.” Third, students engage in extensive writing as a method of developing critical thinking skills.

*Bard College’s distinctive liberal arts curriculum is central to this work, particularly the twin traditions of Writing & Thinking and Seminar. In Writing & Thinking, students undertake “serious play” with language, with texts, with their own writing, and with other students as writers and thinkers. ... In Seminar, students read great books from antiquity to the present, not to meet standardized assessment performance targets but to deepen their thinking by tackling works whose provocations continue to inspire.*

*Library Director, Social Studies faculty, BHSEC Manhattan*

Fourth, the curriculum encourages deeper learning; students are encouraged to continually probe and question ideas to fully understand them. As a part of this, students are encouraged to think for themselves rather than just accepting the ideas proposed by authors or faculty. Finally, BHSEC seeks to provide students with opportunities to apply what they learn as a way for knowledge to become deeper and more real. This also allows them to experience themselves as creative individuals. Hands-on learning happens in labs, in performances, in internships and varied other ways.

**The BHSEC curriculum**

According to the handbook provided to parents of students attending BHSEC-Newark (2012-13), the BHSEC curriculum is designed to help students become independent thinkers and creative do-ers. They are expected to develop:

- Understanding of the scientific method – its approaches to inquiry, its strengths and limitations as a mode of analysis, and a basic comprehension of the fundamental laws governing both physical phenomena and human behavior;
- [An] appreciation of several forms of artistic and literary expression, the creative process, and the disciplined use of imagination, formal structure, and aesthetic values;
- A flexibility of thought that allows for creative problem solving through an integration of quantitative and qualitative techniques;
- Knowledge of some of the most influential works of Western culture and critical understanding of the values, assumptions, and ideologies that they express;
- Knowledge and appreciation of modes of thought of other cultures – including non-Western cultures, and groups or societies that exist as distinct subcultures within Western culture;
- A sense of history – ideas, movements, peoples, and events of the past – and an understanding of how our view of the past is shaped, and shapes our understanding of the present and future;
- Sensitivity to the moral and ethical dimensions of thought and action, and developing the ability to make informed moral and ethical decisions (p. 7-8).
A prescribed BHSEC course sequence is generally followed by all students during the first two years, with few electives, in order to insure that all students have the same strong foundational skills. President Botstein emphasizes that this fixed curriculum is one of the most important ideas inherited from Baird Whitlock, permitting a “coherent intellectual plan.” At the same time, there are no standardized texts and the material for each course is selected by the instructor. President Botstein notes that faculty autonomy over course content and materials is “non-negotiable.” Faculty are hired as experts in their fields and encouraged to be active in their disciplines; they often choose texts and materials that they enjoy in order to engage students and keep the curriculum rich and varied.

One of the BHSEC Dean of Studies notes that the curriculum is a product of backward design: “We know where we want students to end up and we plan backward to figure out how to get them there.” To do so, students are gradually introduced to important concepts, a practice known as scaffolding.

Faculty will start to use some terms in 9th grade that become really important at the college level. Maybe they will spend more time defining and talking about those terms so it is scaffolded for them... That is one of the most important things about BHSEC. You need the 9th and 10th grade to get the kids ready to be able to do the work at the college level. Even if a task doesn’t go as far, or isn’t as long, or isn’t as sophisticated, the seeds are planted.

Dean of Studies, BHSEC Newark

The BHSEC curriculum is constructed to allow students to compete all requirements for a high school diploma as well as all of the courses that culminate in a Bard College Associates Degree. This is accomplished by awarding dual credit (both high school and college credit) for most of the college-level courses taught. The Newark equivalency chart from 2012-13 on page 6 illustrates how this can be accomplished. Specific course offerings vary by school and department.

Language Arts/Literacy: As noted, reading and writing are emphasized throughout the BHSEC curriculum. However, specific Language Arts/Literacy courses are offered as well. High school Language Arts courses are designed to meet local and state requirements in each locale. For example, in the New York BHSEC schools, students take Literacy of the Americas and World Literature, after which they take the relevant Regents exams.

At the college level, all BHSEC schools offer the 4-semester college Seminar sequence, modeled on Bard College’s Seminar. These courses covers both Language Arts and Social Studies requirements. Year 1 Seminar focuses on the critical reading of influential works of literature, philosophy, science, economics and history from antiquity through the 18th century. Year 2 Seminar exposes students to a range of texts from the 19th and 20th centuries and concludes with an examination of “the modern condition.” All students are required to write a Year 2 thesis. In addition, students can choose from college electives such as The Novels of Tolstoy, Memoir and Autobiography, Modern Chinese Fiction and Film, or Introduction to Cultural
# Course Equivalencies: BHSEC Newark and Newark Public School Graduation Requirements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>General NPS Course</th>
<th>General NPS Years</th>
<th>General NPS Credits</th>
<th>BHSEC Newark Course</th>
<th>BHSEC Newark NPS Credits</th>
<th>BHSEC Newark Bard Credits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>English I</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>English 9: Literature of Americas I &amp; II</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>English II</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>English 10: World Literature I &amp; II Year 1 Seminar I (fall semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English III</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>Year 2 Seminar I (fall semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English IV</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Literature elective</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>20 credits</td>
<td>Mathematics 9: Algebra I &amp; Geometry</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mathematics 10: Algebra II &amp; Trigonometry</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<td></td>
<td>College Math (one semester or full year¹)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>20 credits</td>
<td>Introduction to Science &amp; Biology</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chemistry &amp; Physics</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Lab Science (one semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Lab Science (one semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>World History</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>Social Studies 10: Area Studies I &amp; II Year 2 Seminar II (spring semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US History I</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>10 credits</td>
<td>Social Studies 9: History of Americas I &amp; II Year 1 Seminar II (spring semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>US History II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td>½ year</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
<td>Financial Literacy</td>
<td>2.5 credits</td>
<td>non-credit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester Course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College History elective</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>3 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Language</td>
<td>World Language I</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>10 credits</td>
<td>Intro to Language &amp; World Languages 9</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>World Language II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>World Languages 10, I &amp; II</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College World languages (fall semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College World Languages (spring semester)</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>4 credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and</td>
<td>Visual and</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>Introduction to Arts 9, I &amp; II</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹While most students will complete each semester of college mathematics at the one-semester pace, full-year versions of College Algebra and College Pre-Calculus will be available for students who need additional math supports.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performing Arts</th>
<th>Performing Arts</th>
<th>Arts electives 10</th>
<th>5 credits</th>
<th>5 credits</th>
<th>--</th>
<th>3 credits</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health, Safety and Physical Education</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health I</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health 9, I &amp; II</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>non-credit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health II</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health 10, I &amp; II</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<td>non-credit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health III</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health electives</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
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<td>non-credit</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health IV</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health electives</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>non-credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21st Century Life &amp; Careers</td>
<td>Career-Technical Education Course</td>
<td>Phys Ed/Health electives</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>non-credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Year 1 College Experience</td>
<td>5 credits</td>
<td>15 credits</td>
<td>2 credits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electives</td>
<td>Electives</td>
<td>Five College Electives (two of which must be from Literature or Social Studies)</td>
<td>25 credits</td>
<td>15 credits</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>130 credits minimum</td>
<td>177.5 credits minimum</td>
<td>60 credits minimum</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Math:** BHSEC schools work hard to balance coverage and depth in the high school math sequence. Students need to master core concepts quickly to be ready for college math by 11th grade. At the same time, staff point out that there are advantages to developing a deeper understanding, and that this is hard to do when time is limited. In general, students take Algebra, Geometry and Trigonometry during the high school years although the way these are taught may vary. At both BHSEC Manhattan and Newark, all students take a combined Algebra and Geometry course in 9th grade and Algebra II and Trigonometry in 10th Grade. BHSEC Manhattan also teaches Modeling in 10th grade.

At the college level, students choose from among a number of math courses and sequences. As an example, BHSEC Queens distinguishes their core college math sequence culminating in Calculus III from a series of electives such as Statistics and Computing: Graphics and Games.

Across schools, students are advised to select the courses that align with their plans for the future. For example, at BHSEC Manhattan students are advised to consider the following college options:

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2Some students take one regular semester (3 college credit) course; some take multiple 1 credit courses which meet for varying numbers of hours.

3Because of note 2, the NPS credits per course will vary, but the required courses taken together will be equivalent to at least 5 NPS credits.

4This course does not follow the pattern of a college course earning 5 NPS credits per semester instead of per year. This is because College Experience involves a lot of independent study time, and the total coverage is not really equivalent to a college semester course (and hence it only earns 1 Bard credit per semester). Therefore, 5 credits for the year is more appropriate.
From BHSEC Manhattan, Course Sequence and Selection Guide, updated April 2015, p. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTED FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN MATHEMATICS, PHYSICAL SCIENCES, OR ENGINEERING</th>
<th>Introduction to Mathematical Thinking</th>
<th>Calculus I</th>
<th>Calculus II</th>
<th>Computer Science, or Statistical Modeling, or Modern Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| SUGGESTED FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN LIFE SCIENCES, MEDICINE, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES | Introduction to Mathematical Thinking | Calculus I | Computer Science, or Statistical Modeling, or Modern Mathematics |

| SUGGESTED FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN COMPUTER SCIENCE | Introduction to Mathematical Thinking | Calculus I | Calculus II | Computer Science |

| SUGGESTED FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN THE HUMANITIES | Introduction to Mathematical Thinking | Computer Science, or Statistical Modeling, or Modern Mathematics |

**Science:** Science course sequences have evolved over time, but most students across the BHSEC schools take chemistry, physics and biology. BHSEC Manhattan embraces a “Physics First” approach to the sciences. According their course information guide in Science, “The Physics First sequence parallels the increasing level of complexity in the natural world: physics is the most fundamental science. Its principles govern how atoms and molecules behave and lay the foundation for chemistry” (p. 1). BHSEC Queens started out by offering physics in 9th grade as well but decided to offer an Introduction to Science overview in 9th grade instead.

At the college level, students are generally expected to take two lab sciences and may take other lab or non-lab science courses as electives. A number of course options are available such as Organic Chemistry and Physics of Sustainable Energy (Manhattan), Materials Science/Polymer Chemistry and Infectious Diseases (Queens). As with math, students may be advised to pick their science courses based on their ultimate college or career goals. When designing labs, efforts are made to insure that students are solving real problems rather than just doing “cookbook labs.”

**Social Studies/Humanities:** Most students take US History and Global Studies/World History during the high school years, both of which are usually required to meet district or state graduation requirements. At the college level, all students participate in Seminar, as noted above, which meets Social Studies requirements as well as those in Language Arts. In addition, students are generally required to take four semesters of other college-level social studies/humanities courses. Specific courses offered vary considerably, influenced to a large extent by the specializations of the faculty in each school. Students select courses that they
think are interesting or aligned with future college majors. Examples of college electives offered at BHSEC Queens are:

- The Cultural History of Food
- Modern Revolutions
- Art History I
- Child and Adolescent Developmental Psychology
- Introduction to Russian Culture
- World War I and the Making of the Modern Era
- American Environmental History
- The History of Wealth & Inequality in High Income Nations.

Languages: Substantial exposure to a foreign language is a priority among the BHSEC schools. According to a course guide published by the BHSEC Manhattan Foreign Language Department, “The goal of the Foreign Language Department is to foster a level of proficiency whereby students are able to read, translate, speak, and comprehend the works of major authors, develop a strong level of linguistic competency and cultural literacy as well as develop analytical skills that cut across the curriculum” (p. 1). In general, each school offers at least one Western and one non-Western language with Spanish and Chinese the most commonly offered. Latin is available at some schools as well. The language course sequences offered at the schools are straightforward (i.e. Spanish, I, II, III, etc.) until Year 2, when more varied electives are offered.

Students at each school are required to take a substantial number of courses in a foreign language, although the specific requirement varies by school. While at BHSEC Queens, students begin in 9th grade taking courses in a foreign language, BHSEC Manhattan and BHSEC Newark students start out 9th grade in a course that introduces them to the languages offered in the school. After this experience, students pick a language to study going forward.

Arts: All of the BHSEC schools include arts as a central part of the curriculum. The rationale is expressed eloquently in a statement by the BHSEC Manhattan Arts Department: “Skills and experiences in the arts deepen perception and allow us to engage with the world in more serious and complex ways. Art work equips students to express and exercise individuality, membership in a community, and to connect with one’s culture both historically and in the present.” Depending on the school, courses may be offered in theater, music, dance, and/or visual arts. Courses that teach practice of the art (e.g., World Drumming, Print Making ) are available alongside of courses that provide a more theoretical foundation (e.g., Evolution of Opera, Intro to Jazz History)

Teaching the BHSEC curriculum

BHSEC emphasizes a student-centered classroom, where students learn through discussion, thinking and writing rather than through lecturing. They are encouraged to interact with texts in order to surface the main ideas as well as to reflect on how they intersect with one another.
On the day of my visit the students had been asked to identify as part of their homework three passages from the assigned reading and to record these passages in their notebooks along with a brief comment on each explaining why they chose the passage, why it was significant and interesting. The teacher devoted several minutes of class time walking around the room checking on these notebook selections, making sure the work had been completed and in enough detail to be useful in the text based discussion that would follow.

*Ray Peterson, Responses to the Common Core, 2012*

Teachers are guided to focus on depth over breadth, insuring that students have a clear conceptual understanding of each topic before moving on to the next one. Assignments typically take considerable thought to complete and students are encouraged to dig deeply into the material.

In addition, all students participate in the annual Writing and Thinking Workshop, offered every year during the first week of school. Students attend three workshops each day, and the workshops have 10-12 students with one professor. In these workshops they are introduced or re-introduced to the types of texts, analyses, and discussions they will encounter throughout the year. These workshops establish patterns of teaching and learning that are core to BHSEC’s instructional approach.

All faculty participate in professional development at the Bard Institute for Writing and Thinking and are given a *Writing and Thinking Workshop Faculty Guidebook* which provides guidance on how to teach using these methods. Teachers support each other in finding ways to instill these skills across all disciplines and grade levels. Grade team meetings are held for faculty to discuss non-cognitive and cognitive expectations for their courses. Departments also work together to discuss discipline-specific pedagogical topics. For example, one department at BHSEC Newark is working to unify the way that they assess oral presentation skills.

**Preparing students for college level work**

BHSEC students face two transitions to college. First, they begin college level work in 11th grade. Second, they must be ready to begin college, often as transfer students, outside of a protected environment after they graduate from BHSEC. Both present challenges.

It is a tall order to expect high school students with varying skill sets to be ready for exclusively college level work beginning in the 11th grade. The BHSEC 9th and 10th grade structure is designed to facilitate this readiness. Teachers introduce complex content and high expectations for analysis and writing in the 9th and 10th grades to prepare students for Years 1 and 2. BHSEC students have the same teachers for their high school and college courses, which helps facilitate the continual development of fundamental skills throughout their four years.
BHSEC also prepares students for college level work by progressively increasing students’ level of independence and responsibility for learning each year. Homework is checked less often at the college level. Several faculty note that their expectations increase as students get older. As one Dean of Studies put it, “There is less leeway for a 10th grader than a 9th grader.” Students are considered ready for college level work in 11th grade (Year 1) if they have earned at least a 2.0 GPA in their high school years. Occasionally, students will take a high school course or two during Year 1.

*BHSEC students develop an extraordinary ability to think about and talk about complex ideas. When our students graduate, they have already developed many of the skills of engaging with texts and approaching problems that most students have to struggle with during their first years in college.*

BHSEC faculty comment, faculty survey

In addition, BHSEC explicitly assists students with the transition from BHSEC to other colleges. The intensive college advising program helps them to make good choices about where to attend college and assists with the logistics of applying for admission and financial aid. And, along with the instruction received in classrooms, it prepares them for the cognitive challenges of moving into new college settings. Students returning to BHSEC after attending college generally comment on how well prepared they feel for the college courses they encounter.

**Extra-curricular learning**

BHSEC makes a point of providing students with opportunity to learn outside of regular classrooms. These take the form of special activities such as the annual day devoted to student performances and presentations and school clubs (e.g., debate club, honor society, gay-straight alliance, sustainability club). There are also opportunities for students to participate in internships with local companies or to take summer courses at other colleges.

Students are also intentionally exposed to experiences that will broaden their horizons. For example, as part of the college application process, many students participate in a college trip. For many, this is the first time they have understood the range of options open to them.

*I think the BHSEC experience that has had the biggest experience on me has been the … trip that introduced me to six amazing colleges, one that I fell in love with, and thanks to all the help I have gotten, will be attending this fall. It is definitely an experience that I would not have had if I had gone to a different school. The dorming experience also was amazing because it was the first time I was away from my family so it is one that I will carry with me.*

BHSEC Queens Alumna, Class of 2013
Quality control and improvements to the curriculum

BHSEC works very hard to insure that the curriculum is delivered effectively by faculty and communicated accurately by school leaders, guidance counselors and advisors. Each school has a Dean of Studies who is responsible for curriculum design and delivery, scheduling, and all academic concerns. BHSEC counselors and advisors are trained by the Dean of Studies to make sure that they understand course sequences and offerings. BHSEC principals meet once a month to discuss any issues with their schools, including refinements to their curriculum.

Importantly, BHSEC hires Ph.D. prepared instructors who are immersed in their fields and interested in sharing their passions with young people. They are selected for their ability to function as full college faculty and expected to be contributing, thoughtful participants in building knowledge in their disciplines. In addition, they must demonstrate an ability to teach young people well, incorporating the content required by local districts and Bard College along with instruction related to their own interests. All school leaders also serve as teachers, keeping them in touch with classroom practice.

Quality controls and curriculum changes are also driven by events at the district level, especially with the roll out of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). For example, math at BHSEC has become more structured as stipulated in the CCSS while English is more flexible because the CCSS emphasize writing and analysis, ideas that were already central to the BHSEC curriculum. Also at the district level, teachers receive mandatory observations as part of their evaluations; these may lead to curricular refinement as well.

Bard College also has a role in maintaining the quality of the BHSEC curriculum. There is a board comprised of stakeholders from Bard College, Simon’s Rock and the BHSEC schools who meet annually to insure that all courses are meeting Bard’s standards. All new college courses must also be approved by Bard’s registrar, and courses can be rejected because they do not qualify as a class that could be taught at Bard College.

Replication

*A visit to [BHSEC] is a glimpse into the realm of the possible. . . . In class after class, I was struck by how engaged the students were. . . . One of the things [BHSEC] has shown is that kids from wildly different backgrounds . . . can thrive in an educational environment that is much more intellectually demanding than your typical high school.*


The curriculum, taught by skilled and caring faculty, is the heart of BHSEC’s offering to young people. It is carefully constructed to permit students to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate’s degree. It also helps them to develop as true scholars, delving into
complex texts with increasing levels of sophistication and handling rigorous math and science courses with skill.

Schools wishing to replicate all or parts of the BHSEC curriculum are encouraged to take advantage of resources available at BHSEC and Bard College. Many syllabi are available online at http://bhsec.bard.edu/queens/academics/courses/ (BHSEC Queens) or http://bhsec.bard.edu/manhattan/academics/courses/ (BHSEC Manhattan). Faculty from other schools may participate in Bard College’s intensive training sessions available at the Writing and Thinking Institute; to register, go to www.bard.edu/iwt/.

The BHSEC folio series is a publication of BHSEC, in collaboration with the National Center for the Restructuring of Education, Schools, and Teaching (NCREST), a research center at Teachers College, Columbia University. The series includes information on seven exemplary practices associated with the three BHSEC schools. Each publication in the series is based on qualitative research conducted by NCREST.

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Works Cited


