

SEMINARS ENHANCE ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS

BY MAUREEN MALARNEY '12

Bishop Chatard made some changes to its schedule this year by implementing student seminars. The goal of the seminar program has been to enhance both academic culture and the student experience by guiding student self-advocacy. Through different course offerings, club opportunities, enrichment activities and academic assistance, students and teachers have been given the ability to choose what they want to get out of this 30-minute "sweet spot" in their day.

The BCHS administrative staff began discussing modifications to the school schedule during the 2018-2019 school year. While the class structure was academically focused, school leaders felt that the time before and after school was not being fully utilized by students. This shift in the day-to-day schedule was created for the benefit of the students and to diversify the academic culture.

Seminars – the period of the day previously referred to as Home Room – vary in their focus depending on the day of the week. There are three types of seminar days, Seminar A is reserved for Mass and school speakers, Seminar B is for academic enrichment sessions, and Seminar C is a time for cultural, personal and lifestyle enrichment.

Seminar A is divided by grade level, giving students the opportunity to sit with their classmates and peers during Mass. Weekly Masses have been and continue to be an important part of the individual faith formation for students.

A Seminar B day is an academic day. It follows a traditional class structure and students are either enrolled in a course like digital citizenship, a structured content-based study session like AP or SAT help, credit recovery, or in ISTEP remediation sessions. Other options such as a traditional study hall are still available for students. Seminar B days are meant to help students academically in the way that will benefit them the most.

BCHS teacher, Kim Shaw assists students in her Seminar B course: Study Hall/Essential Skills: Grade 9-11. She tailored course guidelines in a way she felt would most benefit her students. "I needed something planned for this group of kids, and I wanted it to be something that they could utilize in every class," Mrs. Shaw said.

Mrs. Shaw explained that the students in her seminar are learning skills that will help them to be better students. They have focused on writing an appropriate email, reaching out to teachers in person for class help, and are gaining the confidence to be more proactive in their schoolwork. "The kids are more organized, and they come ready to work," she said.

Digital Applications and Responsibility courses are available to guide students in habits of trouble-shooting, critical thinking, personal brand building, and mindful media consumption so that they will be able to rise to the challenge of keeping up with the constantly shifting landscape in today's digital culture. BCHS teacher Anne Marie Gerritsen developed the courses.

"It is our intention that we help students deepen their understanding of how and why they use digital technology in their everyday lives, as well as how to leverage the available technology to their advantage," Mrs. Gerritsen explained.

Throughout the first semester, students explored topics including fact-checking, digital security, and how user interface design can play into the strength of our digital wellbeing.

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"One of my favorite products from this semester is a set of interviews about digital wellbeing," Mrs. Gerritsen said. "Students had to record themselves interviewing someone of a different generation about topics relating to balancing our lives on- and offline." She hopes that these topics will lead to continued conversations within the students' families.

A Seminar C day gives teachers and students an opportunity to experience activities that don't fit into a traditional school schedule. The concept of "learning by doing" comes into play and the intent is to develop soft skills and soft qualities like teamwork, independence, initiative, personal responsibility and life skills.

BCHS Vice Principal of Academics Ann Taylor said that Seminar C days are not only valuable for the students, they have been beneficial for the teachers and other adults in the building as well. She described Seminar C days as being a balanced purpose that students need. "Kids are under the stress of academic performance in school, but we wanted to let them know that it is okay to pause and to just be together," she said. "We had kids who we feel were underperforming in their classes, and I think that this has really circumvented all of that."

Both teachers and students helped come up with the different options for a Seminar C day. BCHS teacher Maureen Pappas and Academic Support Team member Michele McCarthy both came up with different but intriguing ways to embrace seminars. Mrs. McCarthy put together a blanket making club for her seminar while Mrs. Pappas organized a group called Pets and Wildlife for Students (P.A.W.S).

Mrs. McCarthy's group helped support an initiative being spearheaded at Christ the King – the donation of 100 blankets to Damar Services, an organization that provides services to a range of people living with behavioral and developmental disabilities.

THE ABC'S OF SEMINARS

"Each student was in charge of making their own blanket," she said. "What I have loved seeing from the students is that they get to see each other in a different light, and this gives students the chance to be a part of something that is bigger than themselves, which helps their confidence," she added. The group's next project may involve making baby blankets that would be donated as well.

After viewing all of the seminar choices as the 2019-2020 school year began, Mrs. Pappas noticed that there was no animal component. Working with animals all her life, she talked about how they have contributed significantly to who she is today, and she wanted to share that experience.

"I feel that seminars have given the students an outreach to an activity they may not have ever participated in. It can also give them a task to focus on besides academics to provide them with additional activities in their academic and highly technology driven world," she said.

Students involved in P.A.W.S participated in a service project called 'Wands for Wildlife,' - collecting mascara wands for use in cleaning wildlife after oil spills and other types of contamination - and this semester are sponsoring "Heaven after Hell," an animal rescue shelter. Mrs. Pappas said, "I feel that as being part of BCHS, giving back and service are a huge component for anyone." The group was also introduced to an arson police dog, therapy dog, pets from students, as well as honeybees and the essential need for their survival.

Seminars have given students an academic focus as well as provided them with a balance that they did not necessarily receive in a homeroom schedule. Senior Erik Bowes took to the idea of seminars. "I think they are a good idea that gives students more choices and more ways to spend their time at school," he said. "It's kind of a more organized homeroom time and I know what to expect."

Erik was one of many students appreciative of the range of options made available during the seminar sessions. Seminars present opportunities for students to learn a new skill, give back, meet new people and branch out. Not only has communication between teachers and students improved, but the different styles of learning have helped BCHS to maximize instructional time and student focused time.

"The success of seminars is a tribute to our teaching staff because teachers were willing to step out of the box and because they saw the potential in what it could be," Mrs. Taylor said. "They have embraced it and made it happen, and I think they've sensed the energy that the kids have for it."



Students participating in the blanket-making seminar presented their handiwork to Christ the King for donation to Damar Services.

SEMINAR A

Mass
School Speakers

SEMINAR B

Chemistry Support
Credit Recovery Courses
Digital Citizenship Courses
Band
Homework Coach/Study Hall
ACT/SAT Prep
ISTEP Remediation
Leadership Development
Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) Test Prep
AP Class Support
Publications

SEMINAR C

Kickball Club
History of Rock and Roll Club
Lego Club
Investment Club
Yoga Club
Mindfulness Club
Euchre Club
Ballroom Dancing Club
Ping Pong Club
Meditation/Stress Management Club
Walking Club
Recycling Club
Pet and Wildlife for Students (P.A.W.S) Club
Outdoor Game Club: Corn Hole/Can Jam/Spike Ball
Blanket-Making Club
Improv Club
Student Council
Athletic Development Club
Philosophy Club
Model UN, Mock Trial, Academic World Quest