

Promising Practice: Wilson High School Academy & Internship Program

AT A GLANCE

As stated in *Wilson High School Academies: Pathways to the Future*:¹

In partnership with our community, parents, staff, and students, Wilson High School identified five critical areas of academia that will promote growth through inquiry and career exploration. The five Academies are an opportunity for students to explore a wide variety of course offerings, engage in college-level research, and investigate possible career pathways in a 21st Century learning environment. Each pathway culminates during a student's senior year with an individualized capstone course or internship and portfolio presentation.

The Wilson High School Academies are:

- Advanced Placement Capstone Academy
- Berks Career and Technology Center Academy
- Global and Financial Leadership Academy
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) Academy
- Visual and Performing Arts Academy

ORIGIN / IMPLEMENTATION

Several years ago, Wilson High School² committed to adopting inquiry-based learning as its instructional model and expanding elective course options. With these changes came the commitment to give all students access to all courses including honors and Advanced Placement (AP). Today, Wilson High School's many electives, along with the required academic courses, are organized into five academies. Further, within the academies, students may select a more focused pathway of courses. For example, within the Global Business and Financial Leadership Academy, students may choose from the following four pathways: Finance, International Relations, Management/Marketing, or Political Science.

As early as freshman year, students may begin selecting courses that align with an academy. This includes I-STEM, a freshman level course of study that includes Honors Physics, Honors Introduction to Engineering and Design, and Algebra II or Geometry. More than 20 percent of freshman students enroll in I-STEM. Continuing in their sophomore and junior years, students may take courses aligned with an academy, and at the end of their junior year they apply for enrollment in the academy. Approximately 40 percent of all junior students do so. Students may change academies at any time and may enroll in more than one academy, allowing them to take electives from two areas of

¹ Retrieved from <https://www.wilsonhsd.com/profile/0916608365036132711063661646/vietshitts/ReadingBerks/>
² <https://www.wilsonhsd.com/> is the profile of the Berks County School District in Pottsville, PA. The district serves approximately 5,900 students in grades K-12 and includes one high school with approximately 1,950 students and 452 full-time teachers.

interest. Successfully completing the courses within an academy allows students to earn graduation recognition.

As stated earlier, Wilson High School embraces a philosophy of “access, options, and choice within the vast academic program,”³ and, as such, allows all students to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, students have the option of enrolling in the Advanced Placement Capstone Academy in which they are required to complete AP Seminar, AP Research and four additional AP courses of their choice. The freshman I-STEM course of study feeds seamlessly into the Advanced Placement Capstone Academy.

Recently, the Honors Internship Program was implemented at Wilson High School to provide junior and senior students with workplace learning experiences. Enrollment in an academy is not required; the program is open to all students. Course credit is granted for successfully completed internships and is based on the number of hours spent in the workplace. For example, .25 credit is earned for a minimum of 40 hours of internship experience, and the maximum 1.0 credit may be earned for internships totally 160 or more hours. Successful internship completion also requires students to make a final presentation reflecting on their experience. Students may participate in an internship during or after school hours or in the summer and must provide their own transportation. Internships may be paid or unpaid. A staff member previously responsible for the state-required graduation project now acts as the Internship Coordinator. Within a few months of the programs initiation, 47 regional businesses applied for student interns.

In addition to the Honors Internship Program, Wilson High School provides several career awareness and exploration opportunities for its students. For example, a Leadership Series is facilitated in which several major businesses send executives to speak with students in the academies. In addition, these business partners often accept student interns, donate or sponsor equipment, and assist in building curriculum.

GOALS

According to Wilson High School Principal, Dr. Fiore, an important goal is to develop an active advisory committee for each academy to further develop and deepen partnerships with regional businesses. Through these relationships, the school and its students benefit on many levels.

IMPACT / RESULTS

Since offering students open access to all classes six years ago, annual enrollment in Advanced Placement courses has increased by more than four hundred students and resulted in the completion of over five hundred additional AP tests. In 2015-2016, over one thousand AP tests were administered. In 2013, Wilson High School was an AP Honor Roll Award winner.

In 2015, Wilson High School received a Silver Medal Award in *U.S. News & World Report's* Best High Schools issue. The school also received a Governor's Award for Excellence in 2013-2014.

³ Retrieved from The Wilson Curriculum at <http://wilsonsd.org/domain/1059>

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ABOUT PA-PIN

With backing from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and ongoing guidance from the Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE), the Pennsylvania Pathways Innovation Network is coordinated by the National Center for College and Career Transitions (NC3T), an organization experienced in all aspects of college and career pathways development.

The PA-PIN is designed to identify and share promising practices and replicable strategies that help support the development and implementation of college and career pathways systems. By bringing together leaders from forward-thinking schools, adult and postsecondary institutions, business organizations, workforce development providers, and non-profit organizations effective and innovative pathways can be designed or expanded to increase learner achievement and address workforce demands.

By joining the PA-PIN, schools and organizations accelerate their efforts to develop scalable and sustainable solutions that strengthen connections between education, employers, and economic development in order to prepare today's students for tomorrow's careers. There is no cost to join the PA-PIN. Visit www.NC3T.com and click on the PIN tab to join.