

LAWRENCE HIGH SCHOOL
CAREER ACADEMIES
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ACADEMY DEFINITION/PURPOSE

1. *What is a career academy?*

A career academy is a small learning community that links students with peers, teachers, and community partners in a disciplined and nurturing environment. Our career academies are focused on fostering academic success and making connections between academics and career aspirations and goals.

Students will voluntarily participate in a college preparatory curriculum with a career theme, which will include core academic required courses, a variety of electives, career-related experiences through community partnerships, and the possibility of certain certifications.

Career Academy Teachers will have mostly academy students in their classes, make a commitment to meet with each other on a regular basis, and share in decision-making related to administrative policies, curriculum content, and instruction.

Community Partners will help build connections for students between school and work, providing students with a range of career, academic, and other learning opportunities.

2. *What are the benefits of joining a career academy?*

A career academy provides the following benefits for students:

- ❖ *A Smaller Learning Community:* A career academy is, by nature, a smaller learning community in which students traditionally stay with a core group of students and teachers in their junior and senior years of high school. The key components comprising a smaller learning community include: several classes (electives) offered either solely to or as a priority to academy students; a core team of teachers; voluntary enrollment by students who are allowed to focus on a discipline of their choice; and opportunities for students to engage in a full range of elective and non-academy courses and other academy events and activities.
- ❖ *College Preparatory Curriculum with a Career Theme:* A career academy maintains an academic focus while at the same time provides vocational or career-related opportunities. The key components of this blending of experience include: academic courses that meet high school graduation and college entrance requirements; common planning time for the teaching team; projects that bring together skills from academic and career courses; special events and activities with career themes; and advisory and counseling time for students.
- ❖ *Partnerships with Employers, Community, and Higher Education:* Career academies establish partnerships with local employers to build stronger connections between school and work, providing students with a range of career development and work-based learning opportunities. Academies also establish partnerships with community organizations, parents, and institutions of higher education. Essential components of these partnerships include: mentoring and job shadowing opportunities for students; advisory boards made up of community professionals; parental participation in activities and parental support for student academy decisions; and opportunities for post-secondary course work for college credit.

3. *What are the academy options?*

At Lawrence High School, students may opt to join any one of three career academies:

- ❖ The Academy of Arts and Humanities
- ❖ The Academy of Business and International Studies
- ❖ The Academy of Science and Technology

CHOOSING AN ACADEMY

4. *How do I choose my academy?*

Students should make choices about joining a career academy based on their personal interests and goals. Of course, students may look to their parents, teachers, and counselors for additional insight and support. Students will make their decisions midway through their sophomore (and junior) year. Students will make an academy choice at the same time they visit with their counselors about course choices and scheduling for the upcoming year.

5. *What if I do not know what professional field I want to get into?*

Becoming a part of an academy does not prevent students from pursuing any dream or goal in life. Career academies are not meant to “pigeon hole” students into any single field, but rather to provide additional opportunities and experiences for students in a broad career area. If a student knows what field he or she would like to enter one day, the career academy will allow him or her to get as many tailored experiences as he or she would like. However, if a student is not certain, he or she may sample a range of courses and experiences within the broader career theme.

CHANGING ACADEMIES AND OTHER COURSES

6. *Do I have to stay in one academy for both junior and senior years?*

At this time, if a student does not wish to remain in an academy after junior year, he or she may make a different choice. Students may not switch academies in the middle of a school year.

7. *Would I be able to take courses from other academies?*

Academy students have the opportunity to take a wide range of core required courses which span all subject areas, including honors and AP courses. In addition, flexibility for electives choices has been built into the requirements for each academy as outlined in the Lawrence High School Course of Study.

PARTICIPATION

8. *Do I have to be in an academy?*

Career academies are not mandatory. Students entering their junior or senior year may choose one of the three academies. If a student chooses not to join an academy, he/she will remain in the LHS comprehensive program.

9. *What if I don't get into the academy of my choice?*

Every effort will be made for all students to participate in the academy of their choice.

10. Can I be in two academies?

The career academy program is designed so that students join one academy, but have flexibility to take courses outside of their academy if they choose.

11. What are the requirements for joining an academy?

All students are welcome to enroll in any of the three career academies. Career academies are open to students who have a desire to explore one of the three academy themes and are willing to complete all career academy graduation requirements outlined in the Lawrence High School Course of Study.

COURSES/SCHEDULE

12. What type of courses will be offered in each academy?

The course of study for each academy is provided in the Lawrence High School Course of Study. The course of study for each academy includes a mix of core required courses and electives. In fact, Lawrence High School provides one of the richest electives offerings in Mercer County.

13. What will my schedule look like?

Members of career academies will follow the Lawrence High School schedule currently in place. The academy will be made up of a cohort of students who may share several classes each day and who may have some of the same teachers from year to year.

14. Will there be different graduation requirements?

No, not in the first year academies open. Students in career academies will not have different graduation requirements than those in the LHS comprehensive program. The difference will be in the choice of electives and the career-themed experiences provided. Once the academies evolve, however, this may change.

15. Will there be team teaching or thematic units in each academy?

Team teaching and thematic units are long-term goals of the career academies. The idea of a small learning community comprises clusters of teachers from academic and vocational disciplines who are scheduled to have mostly Academy students in their classes, who make a commitment to meet with each other on a regular basis, and who share in decision-making related to administrative policies, curriculum, content, and instruction.

16. Do I still have to take four years of English?

Yes, four years of English are a state requirement and therefore remain a requirement for graduation from Lawrence High School, including the academies. These required courses are described in the Lawrence High School Course of Study.

COLLEGE AND EMPLOYMENT RECOGNITION

17. How does being in an academy help to shape my future?

The aim of the career academies is to prepare students for college and careers. Academies enable students to complete college entrance academic requirements while exposing them to a variety of the occupations within a career area, encouraging them to aim as high as they wish. The academy also provides support to its students to increase their achievement in high school. This comes through close relationships with teachers and fellow students; rigorous and relevant curriculum; and exposure to career and educational options outside of the high school walls.

18. Will employers value academy participation?

It is the goal of career academies to provide students with practical knowledge and skills for students to be valued by potential employers. The components that make up the Senior Experience (see question 19 about internships), combined with the various certifications that will be offered as part of the academies, should prove useful and valuable to the community.

19. Will I have an internship?

In the 2011-12 school year, the academies will pilot the new Lawrence High School “Senior Experience” in order to develop it purposefully for years to come. Internships are one way to fulfill the Senior Experience graduation requirement. The components of the Senior Experience may include any one of the following:

- ❖ Career-based learning (for example, job shadowing/internships, community work-study/cooperative education, or Teacher’s Assistant Program)
- ❖ Leadership Opportunities (for example, senior retreat, transition project, Teen PEP, or other peer mentoring opportunities)
- ❖ Service (for example, community service for in-school and after-school projects)
- ❖ Courses (for example, online courses, college/university classes, or independent study)

20. Will choosing an academy limit my college options?

Certainly not! The career academies are centered on a rigorous and relevant academic program that prepares students well for college. In fact, the course of study and the experiences involved in a career academy are designed to help students make better choices and to provide them with more, not less. Research further supports this notion. In *Career Academies: A Proven Strategy to Prepare High School Students for College and Careers*, educators Stern, Dayton, and Raby point out that, “It is important to emphasize that career academies do not require students to commit to a field of work for the rest of their lives. Students who graduate from a health academy, for example, might go on to college and major in English, engineering, or anything else. And these would all be considered successful outcomes.”