GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Graduation from the Urban Academy is based on demonstration of proficiency in a number of areas and successful completion of courses each semester.

Each year, students review their record and their progress toward graduation with several members of staff. Together they examine the student's strengths and weaknesses in order to plan an appropriate course and proficiency schedule leading to a graduation date.

COURSES

Urban Academy believes an educated person is one who is able to reach informed judgments in a wide range of subjects. We also believe that a spread of courses will deepen the students' understanding of topics which already interest them as well as expose them to new ideas, issues and information. Therefore, students register for a spread of courses and are expected to pass each course every semester in order to graduate. Students who do this will have some flexibility and choice in planning their senior year. Special programming options such as internships, first choice classes, independent research periods and college courses are possible.

Students who fail courses during their early semesters at Urban Academy will have less choice in planning their senior year. They will need to make up subject area work to fulfill a balanced spread of courses and prepare for proficiency level work. Students who fail too many courses will have to postpone their graduation date.

PROFICIENCIES

The proficiencies are projects – such as papers, exhibits, presentations and experiments – that allow students to demonstrate their ability to use the skills they have developed in their courses. Successful completion of these projects leads to an Urban Academy diploma.

Proficiencies ensure that Urban Academy graduates are well educated, have successfully demonstrated aspects of what they know, and have achieved a depth of academic experience during their high school career. They require persistence as well as competence. The five academic proficiencies – Creative Arts, Literature, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science – build on students' successful participation in a wide range of courses. These proficiencies all require work over an extended period of time, sometimes a year or more.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFICIENCIES & COURSES

The skills developed in courses are cumulative, leading to the successful completion of proficiencies. For example, students may take Plant Science, Physics, and Chemistry in different semesters. In each course they will be expected to work on research design, ask good questions, test hypotheses, write up observations and look into what others in the field have done. If they do the assignments, ultimately, they should reach a level that permits them to meet proficiency standards as part of their normal course work.

The same is true in the arts. Students should find that courses such as Photography, Sculpture, Poetry, Painting and Acting, help to develop critical abilities and the ability to express ideas in forms other than analytic writing. Ultimately, as in other subject areas, students will find that the body of work they develop over time will meet proficiency standards.

In the areas mentioned above, as well as in other areas not covered, the courses students choose may not immediately satisfy a specific proficiency. Rather, the sum total of courses is designed to help develop academic skills and to prepare students for the proficiencies.

It is important to understand that passing a proficiency is not the same as passing a course. Students might well pass a course that required an analytic essay, receive a good grade, yet find that the essay does not qualify for a successfully completed proficiency. This may be the case because the student was writing this kind of paper for the first or second time. Though the student demonstrated improvement, there is more that the student must learn in order to be proficient. Grades reflect effort and progress as well as good scholarship. Proficiencies indicate that students have attained a high level of academic achievement. The two are not necessarily the same.

THE PROFICIENCIES:
The following five proficiencies require students to demonstrate a level of competence in critical analysis resulting from their course work. (Note: Each proficiency is explained on its own page. Keep scrolling down to read each explanation.)

1. Creative Arts

Prerequisite: Prior to undertaking this proficiency, the student must receive the recommendation of two teachers. At least one class must be in the area in which the student plans to complete their proficiency.

Proficiency: The creative arts proficiency consists of a project that demonstrates growth over time in one of the following areas; visual art, playwriting, acting, poetry, film/video or computer design. * This proficiency generally requires about a year's work.

Steps to completing the creative arts proficiency:

1. In a course in the area of their interest, the student approaches a teacher to mentor the work. The student should have at least a rough idea of what they would like to work on.

2. The student outlines a plan for the project with a mentor. Deadlines for the various stages required to complete the proficiency are set by the mentor and the student.

3. The student works on their project.

4. Once a significant amount of work is completed, a formal critique will be scheduled with an outside artist.

5. When the student and mentor feel that the work demonstrates proficiency, the final project must be presented to the public. Visual arts projects must include a short text as part of the presentation.

6. Finally, the student must submit a written reflection regarding the entire process that the mentor will submit to the proficiency coordinator.

* If a student has been working in an artistic area that the Urban Academy does not offer, the student, with faculty approval, may work with an outside experienced instructor/artist. The student must also work with a member of the UA staff, who will monitor progress and deadlines for proficiency.

Prerequisite: Prior to undertaking this proficiency, the student must receive the recommendation of 2 teachers whose literature courses they have successfully completed. The student must also write an approved critical analysis comparing two literary works in a literature course.

Proficiency: The student will choose a mentor and work with them to select a novel and prepare for the proficiency discussion.
The student has a discussion with an outside examiner about a work of fiction selected from our literature list (substitute selections may be proposed). This discussion covers issues raised by the novel, the structure and style of the novel, the perspective of the author, and comparisons with other works of fiction.

To prepare for the discussion with the outside evaluator, the students must select several passages from the novel that serve as good examples of the novel's important themes or issues. The student is responsible for opening the discussion with these passages.

Writing Requirement: All students must take and pass one writing workshop course. A writing workshop course is a course in which the students' writing is the primary text of the course. In these courses students' writing is read, critiqued and revised regularly.

This course may be taken at any point in the student's time at Urban Academy.

The following courses satisfy the writing requirement:

Autobiography Writing Workshop
Essay Writing --for seniors
Essay Writing --not for seniors
Fiction Writing Workshop
Plays and Playwriting
Poetry Workshop
Looking for an Argument

All courses that satisfy the requirement, including new courses, will be labeled in the course catalog.

Prerequisite:

1. *Logic Proof***:** students must solve a logic puzzle. They must write a proof which explains why this is the only possible solution.   This prerequisite will be offered in math class twice during each semester.

2. Students must pass Algebra 2 and Geometry **<u>AND</u>** receive approval from the Math Department.

Proficiency:
Students must complete a math application project in conjunction with passing an advanced math class.

<u>List of Possible Advanced Math Classes:</u>
● Advanced Algebra
● Trigonometry
● Probability
● Applied Statistics
● Proofs and Games
● Pre Calculus
● Calculus

After approval by their mentor, students will present their project to an outside evaluator and complete any necessary revisions.

Prerequisite:

Coursework: The student must complete satisfactory work in at least two science classes. The classes must be in different areas of science. At least one of these classes must be hands-on.

Lab Report: In a hands-on science class, the student must complete an approved independent investigation, including the following tasks:
● conduct relevant background research
● frame a question
● design an experiment
● conduct the experiment
● analyze the data
● report the findings in an approved lab report

Proficiency:
Follow-up Lab Report: Building on a study that was successfully completed in a previous hands-on course, the student must conduct a follow-up study in an appropriate hands-on course. The follow-up will include some of the following tasks, to be determined by the student, mentor, and science department:

● extend the background research
● revise the question
● revise the experimental design
● repeat the experiment, and/or
● extend the statistical analysis of the results.

All students must report their findings in an approved lab report.

Defense: The student will defend their follow-up lab report before a committee of teachers and an outside evaluator.

Prerequisite: the student must get the recommendation of two social studies teachers and complete an approved analytic paper in one of their social studies courses.

Proficiency: the student writes a proficient social studies paper. The paper must present a clear argument backed up by evidence that addresses a debatable question. The paper must present background for the issue being discussed (in other words, the student must have read a considerable amount on the topic), analyze conflicting sources and demonstrate solid organizational and writing skills. In addition to presenting a clear argument, the paper must also explain why opposing arguments are less valid. When the paper has been approved by the mentor, it will be presented to a small committee for a final review.

Before beginning the proficiency and after having completed the prerequisites, the student must meet with their social studies mentor to define an appropriate question and to discuss the tasks to be undertaken.

As the final step, the student must defend their paper before an outside evaluator.

During the process the mentor will set draft deadlines, as appropriate, which must be observed. The final paper must be submitted and the defense held before the end of the semester. Any extension of this deadline requires formal approval from the mentor.

The following graduation requirements take a slightly different form:

<u>The Library Research Project:</u> During their first semester at Urban Academy students must demonstrate that they are able to use library resources effectively. Students will be given a specific library research project to complete in the library and online.

<u>Community Service:</u> The student must receive good recommendations from their community service placements, which are part of the weekly schedule every semester. If a recommendation is unattainable, the student must write a letter of explanation. The student must also be prepared to participate in a discussion or panel analyzing the Community Service experience.

<u>Criticism Course:</u> Students must take one course in which works of art are viewed, interpreted and critiqued. In these courses (marked in the course catalog) students will also read and discuss criticism of the art that they view.

Notes:

Proficiency Coordinators are responsible for the general operation of each proficiency. They set up meetings with outside examiners and with assessment committees to evaluate the quality of student work being produced. They are available to answer questions and deal with problems as they arise.

Mentors are almost always teachers of classes in subject areas where a proficiency is being attempted by a student during a specific semester. Students are responsible for requesting a meeting with a possible mentor as soon as they start thinking about working on a specific proficiency. Mentors are available to consult, support, focus and help students in any way they can as students work. Mentors ultimately make the recommendation to the coordinator that a student's work has achieved a proficiency level. Before beginning work on a proficiency in any area, the student must choose a mentor and meet with that mentor to discuss the proficiency work to be done.

<u>Proficiency Coordinators:</u>

Creative Art : Marcela
Literature: Becky
Math: Andrea
Science: Terri
Social Studies: Caitlin
The Library Research Project: Cathy

Waivers: Taking a college course through our college course programs at Hunter College and Sarah Lawrence College and earning a B- or better entitles a student to one proficiency waiver in the area of the course. Prerequisites still must be completed in that area. Other requirements, such as an oral defense of the work completed in the course, may also be necessary, depending on the structure of the course.

Junior and Senior Steps to Graduation

The Urban Academy policy is based on the assumption that a student will participate in four full years of high school. Students who have completed proficiencies in a shorter period of time will be able to choose courses, internships, independent studies or other aspects of the Urban Academy program to complete their high school education.

Junior Status:

All students about to enter what they believe to be their Junior year will plan with their organizational tutorial teacher which prerequisites they will do in which courses in order to meet senior status.

Senior Status (two semesters to go):

The records of all candidates for senior status will be evaluated at a full staff meeting.
A student will be recognized by staff as a **"senior"** when one of the following criteria is satisfied:

Criteria 1:
- one proficiency completed
- all prerequisites completed
- algebra 2 and geometry completed
- logic proof **or** math application completed
- passed courses

Criteria 2:
- two proficiencies completed
- science pre req completed
- algebra 2 and geometry completed
- at least one literature and one social studies class completed
- either the literature or the social studies pre req paper completed
- passed courses

Conditional Senior Status: Students who do not meet either of these two categories, but are quite close, can meet with their tutorial teacher and discuss a proposal which the tutorial teacher will submit to the staff. The staff may approve it with specific conditions for summer work or September work. If they meet these conditions, they will become seniors.

Graduating Senior Status (one semester to go):

A student will be recognized by staff as a "**graduating senior**" when the student has:
- completed three proficiencies
- completed all prerequisites
- completed proposals for both the science and the creative arts proficiencies which have been accepted by mentors and are in progress
- passed courses

Conditional Graduating Senior Status: Students who do not meet these requirements, but are quite close, can meet with their tutorial teacher and discuss a proposal which the tutorial teacher will submit to the staff. The staff may approve it with specific conditions for after-school work to catch up. If they meet these conditions by the deadline set, they will become graduating seniors.

Courses:

In the final three semesters, to achieve either "**senior**" status or "**graduating senior**" status, **and to actually graduate**, a student may not fail more than one course in the preceding semester.
- If a student fails two classes in the preceding semester, qualification will depend on meeting the stipulations set by the staff
- If a student fails three classes in either preceding semester, the desired status cannot be achieved