

# 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 six academic proficiencies – Creative Arts, Criticism, 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. In addition, students are required to document their progress every semester in the following proficiency areas: Community Service, Urban Academy Community Contribution, Class Participation and Reading.

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFICIENCIES & COURSES**

The skills developed in courses are cumulative, leading to the successful completion of proficiencies. For example, students may take Horticulture, Mechanics, 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 students 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 six proficiencies require students to demonstrate a level of competence in critical analysis resulting from their course work.

## ***1. Creative Arts***

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

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

Steps to completing the creative arts proficiency;

1. In a subsequent course in the area of their interest, the candidate approaches a teacher to mentor the work. The candidate should have at least a rough idea of what they would like to work on.
2. The candidate 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 candidate works on his/her project.
4. Once a significant amount of work is completed, a formal critique will be scheduled with an outside evaluator. Following the critique, the student must submit a written response following the critique to his/her mentor. The mentor will give a copy to the coordinator.
5. When the candidate 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 (on the sheet provided) which 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, he/she, with faculty approval, may work with an outside experienced instructor/ artist. The candidate must also work with a member of the UA staff, who will monitor progress and deadlines for proficiency.

**Student Notes of Their Progress:**

## **2. Criticism**

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**Prerequisite:** the candidate must be recommended by a teacher and/or get the approval of the coordinator. The student must also sit in a presentation of another student. Many student complete this proficiency before their 2nd year.

### **Proficiency:**

1. Student selects a mentor.
2. Student views a work of art in a museum or gallery and finds one that s/he does not like or has questions about.
3. Student finds 3 articles\* about the artist's work – plus a 4th article\* which offers a biography of, as well as a historical context for, that artist and the artist's work. Student writes a thoughtful summary of each article and submits articles, summaries and photograph of work with proposal.
4. The proposal consists of a one page statement giving the artist's name, work of art, medium, copies of articles and summaries, a photograph, and a list of people who might be interviewed about the artist and the work. The proposal should also state what the initial interest in the work was.
5. Student works with mentor to finalize a proposal to be submitted to coordinator and to structure interview questions for use with a person knowledgeable about the artist and the work chosen. Student submits proposal to coordinator at a deadline established after Autumn or Winter project.
6. Once approval is received, student will be assigned a date for his/her presentation. The student should begin interview process upon receipt of proposal approval from coordinator.
7. Student conducts first interview.
8. Student types up transcript of the first interview, and submits to mentor.
9. Student works with mentor to revise questions and prepare new questions for a second interview, using information gathered from first interview, and raising additional issues.
10. Student conducts second interview and types it up.
11. Student types up transcript of 2nd interview and two weeks before scheduled presentation, the student submits two copies of typed transcripts from both interviews to mentor. Mentor will give a copy to the coordinator.
12. Student discusses finding and prepares with mentor for final presentation. One week before scheduled presentation date, student submits the following to coordinator: transcripts, images, quotes. The package should include an appropriately sized reproduction of the work and appropriate quotes highlighted from the articles and interviews selected in consultation with the mentor.
13. Student discusses findings with the mentor, coordinator, other teachers, and, whenever possible, with an appropriate outside evaluator, in a roundtable discussion of the work and the issues raised during the whole process (interview and research).

\* Articles will be accepted from: Art Journals, newspapers, magazine reviews, or gallery publications. Mentors will offer advice regarding legitimate sources.

### **Student Notes of Their Progress:**

### ***3. Literature***

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**Prerequisite:** Recommendation of two teachers for each of whom student has successfully completed a literature course. A recommendation from a teacher for whom the student has written an acceptable critical analysis of a literary work.

**Proficiency:** the candidate 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, for example, issues raised by the novel, the structure of the novel, the perspective of the author and comparisons with other works of fiction. The student will choose a mentor and work with him/her to select a novel and prepare for the proficiency discussion.

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 structure of the novel, and the author's style of writing and use of language. 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

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

**Student Notes of Their Progress:**

#### ***4. Math***

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##### **Prerequisite:**

1. Calculations: student must pass a basic skill test covering decimals, fractions, percents and fundamental algebra. This prerequisite will be offered in class periodically.
2. Passed algebra 2 and geometry.

##### **Proficiency:**

The candidate must complete two assignments for the proficiency. These may be completed in any order.

1. Logic Proof: students must arrive at a solution to a logical puzzle from limited given information. They must then prove in an ordered, efficient and comprehensive manner that this is the only solution to the puzzle.
2. Application: the candidate must complete a math assignment, problem or project. The student will choose which proficiency area s/he would like to attempt. This work may be done in conjunction with passing an advanced math class- Trigonometry, Pre-Calculus, Probability and Statistics , Puzzles or Polygraph. Alternatively, with the permission of the coordinator, it may be an application to work done in a non-math class involving advanced mathematics. Some examples include a statistical analysis of a science experiment, a social science mathematical analysis, or a computer program that addresses a complex problem.

This work must demonstrate the student's ability to:  
apply general concepts and  
indicate to an examiner an in-depth knowledge of the concepts used.

Deadlines will be scheduled by the mentor so that adequate time is allowed for completion, revision and evaluation of the proficiency before the end of the school year.

Completed proficiencies will be reviewed by an outside evaluator.

##### **Student Notes of Their Progress:**

## ***5. Science***

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### **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.

### **Student Notes of Their Progress:**

## ***6. Social Studies***

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**Prerequisite:** the candidate must get the recommendation of two social studies teachers and complete an approved analytic paper.

**Proficiency:** the candidate 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 his/her social studies mentor to define an appropriate question and to discuss the tasks to be undertaken.

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

**Student Notes of Their Progress:**

**Proficiencies in the following areas must be recorded over the entire time a student attends the Urban Academy.**

**Community Service:** The candidate must receive good recommendations from his/her community service placements. If a recommendation is unattainable, the student must write a letter of explanation. The candidate must also be prepared to participate in a discussion or panel analyzing the Community Service experience.

**Class Participation:** at each individual conference, the student must demonstrate, using specific examples, that he/she has achieved a high standard of participation in the life of his/her classes.

**UA Community Contribution:** At each individual conference, the student must describe to the satisfaction of the staff, positive contribution to the Urban Academy community.

**Reading:** The candidate must demonstrate, each year, to the tutorial/proficiency teacher, that s/he is an active and independent reader. This demonstration will include the compilation of a list of books read, or attempted, and a cumulative narrative, which describes such items as when the student read, his/her reflections while reading, his/her responses to ideas in the books selected, and any other related considerations. In addition to the books read for high school or college classes, the list must reflect books read outside school, particularly during the winter reading period and over the summer holidays.

To facilitate achievement in both proficiencies and courses, students must complete:

**The Library Research Proficiency:** during their first semester at Urban Academy students must demonstrate that they are able to use library resources effectively. A specific library research project will be given to students by their tutorial/proficiency teacher.

**The Computer Requirement:** At least one written piece of the proficiencies discussed above must be completed on a computer.

**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.

**Proficiency Coordinators**

Creative Art : Marcela  
Criticism: Roy  
Literature: Karen  
Math: Andrea  
Science: Terri G  
Social Studies: Caitlin  
The Library Research: Cathy

## **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 are responsible for arranging a meeting with their organizational tutorial teacher to discuss graduation requirements.

### **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
- .... either the logic proof or application completed
- ... passed courses

#### **Criteria 2:**

- .... two proficiencies completed
- .... math calculations, algebra 2 (or its equivalent) and geometry (or its equivalent) completed
- .... science pre req completed
- .... at least one literature class completed
- ... at least one social studies class completed
- .... either the literature or the social studies pre req paper completed
- ... passed courses

Students who do not meet either of these two categories, but believe they should be considered seniors, can meet with their tutorial teacher and discuss a proposal which the tutorial teacher will prepare for submission to the staff. Staff will discuss the proposal and decide whether to approve it. If so, senior status will be granted with specific conditions.

### **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
- .... proposals accepted for both the science and the creative arts proficiencies
- .... mentors in both the science and creative arts proficiencies who confirm that work in each area is well underway
- ... passed courses

Students who do not meet these criteria but believe they should be considered graduating seniors, can meet with their tutorial teacher and discuss a proposal which the tutorial teacher will prepare for submission to the staff. If it is approved, graduating senior status will be granted with specific conditions.

### **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

## **Internships**

1. Staff generates list of students who would most benefit, assigns mentors and defines proficiencies\* to be substituted. Mentors approach students.
2. Student speaks with potential supervisor using questions raised in discussion with mentor.
3. Two weeks before proposed internship is to start, student and mentor submit proposal to staff, including some or all of the following:
  - a. Description of the site, name of site supervisor and contact number
  - b. Summary of discussion with supervisor
  - c. Description of specific work involved
  - d. How this work will contribute to the agency or individual served
  - e. Specific skills to be addressed by the intern
  - f. Possible schedule
4. Staff reviews proposal. If approved, student begins internship.
5. Student is responsible for a daily log of hours and weekly log of activities and accomplishments.
6. Mentor maintains regular contact with supervisor to monitor progress and attendance.
7. Student meets regularly with other interns and meets with mentor bimonthly.
8. Halfway through:
  - a. Mentor visits
  - b. Student writes progress report on:
    - i. His/her contribution at the internship
    - ii. What skills are involved in making that contribution
    - iii. How s/he can improve the quality of his/her contribution
    - iv. What s/he is learning from the experience
  - c. Mentor is responsible for preparing a comment for student's mid-term report.
9. At the conclusion of the internship:

Student writes final report, consisting of:

  - i. Assessment of his/her skills, contributions and perspectives on the experience and/or
  - ii. Review of the internship to be kept in a book for future students
10. Student discusses the experience and the report with his/her mentor experience.
11. Student meets with supervisor to discuss his/her experience. Where appropriate, mentor is present as well.
12. Student presents internship to other students. This could be:
  - a. A presentation to the full group
  - b. An open visit to the internship for several other students
  - c. A public demonstration of skills mastered
  - d. A round-table discussion
13. Student receives final comment and grade on student report from mentor.