



Adventures in Education

ELGIN ACADEMY'S "J-TERM" LET'S STUDENTS TAKE A DEEP DIVE (LITERALLY!)

Elgin Academy has introduced a new learning program for its Upper School students. We have all experienced a class that we loved, that we wished would last all day long. Now students in Elgin Academy's Upper School can experience that one class not just all day long, but all month long—with interesting subjects and intensive study. We asked Bonita Goist at Elgin Academy to share the details of the January Term—or "J-Term".

EA'S INAUGURAL JANUARY TERM began on January 6, 2020, with all Upper School students enrolled in one of eight single subject, intensive, month-long classes. Different from a typical class in the Upper School, January Term classes allow students to take a

more in-depth exploration of a topic including field trips, guest speakers, and interactive activities team-taught by members of the Upper School faculty. The classes are comprised of students from freshmen through seniors providing students with the unique opportunity to interact with classmates

they might never have otherwise.

After learning about the concept of a month-long term at the annual convention of ISACS (Independent Schools Association of the Central States), in January 2018, Doug Sept, Upper School Director, and several members of the faculty visited University High School in Carmel, Indiana to observe their version of January Term. This program had been offered at the University School for many years and the group from EA was able to observe the classes, see the faculty and students in action, and ask questions of both the faculty and students about their experiences. From that initial visit in 2018, the idea of a January term was formed and evolved, faculty made proposals for classes, students made suggestions and voted for their favorites, and finally surveys were conducted to place students into those classes that had been chosen to be a part of the first January term.

On January 6, students returned from their holiday break to start this new adventure. Doug Sept had this to say about the inaugural J-term class. "The Elgin Academy January Term program provides students with unique, in-depth learning opportunities that are not available at other schools. During these three weeks, our students are developing valuable skills in a variety



Students study natural and artificial intelligence.



Food prep in the Cooking and Cultures class.

of areas of their interest. There has been a sense of excitement on campus so far this week that is typically not present in the first few days after Winter Break, Sept said. Just a few years ago, Upper School students would return from break to face semester exams. Now that exams are given before the holidays, January Term offers a way for students to ease into their return to academics with a refreshing and unique interlude to standard classroom studies.

The following classes were offered in the 2020 January Term:

Art and Identity: As the title suggests, this class explores the concept of identity through art including the idea of creating a safe space from which students can examine and express their true identity. Theatre, visual arts, and music are studied and intermeshed along with personal stories, storyboarding, monologues, and songwriting to give individual voices to student identities through a variety of forms.

Natural and Artificial Intelligence: This class focuses on the question “What is Intelligence?” and explores the ethics and philosophical issues related to Artificial Intelligence and how it relates to natural intelligence. Students study the current state of the art and where AI is likely to head in the future. Finally, they work to build their own AI device.

Cooking and Cultures: No prior cooking experience is required for this course which explores the cultural backgrounds of food while teaching students basic cooking skills, menu planning, and nutrition. The business of food and restaurants is another component of study, and plenty of eating, of course!

Forensics: Students: in this class explore the basics of criminal law, the importance of evidence, and learn basic forensic skills through field trips including to the Kane County Coroner’s office, guest speakers who are experts in the field, and the investigation of a wide range of evidence including fingerprints, hair, fiber, blood, ballistics, and handwriting.

Ocean Studies and SCUBA: Coral reef ecology is a major ecological cause for concern given current climate change warnings. In addition to learning SCUBA skills, students gain valuable knowledge about reef ecology and conservation, decompression tables, and the math involved in the physical impact of diving on the human body. Then, they enter the water for two weeks of open water swimming and SCUBA skills before they head to Belize to complete their SCUBA certification and work with a local reef ecology group.

Comic Books: Comic books and graphic novels make up a large portion of today’s publishing world inspiring television shows and blockbuster movies. In this class, students study the creation, history, and cultural impact of comic books from the early 20th century until today. They will create

their own comic books and learn about a wide variety of comic book publishers, writers, artists, editors, and others involved in the industry.

Hard Boiled Fiction and Film: Students in this class explore this unique genre of books and film that often features a private investigator hot on the trail of some sort of criminal element. There is usually a woman in trouble and deep, dark secrets waiting to be revealed. The class will read a few novels from this genre such as *The Big Sleep* and *The Thin Man*, as well as watch the movies that were inspired by them. The topic of how this genre influenced present day comic-book characters is also discussed.

Northern Minnesota Wilderness Experience: When the SCUBA class departs for sunny and warm Belize, students in the Northern Minnesota Wilderness Experience head to the cold and snowy wilderness of Minnesota to explore the history of the Great Lakes Region including the geologic and glacial history, native inhabitants, and French explorers and fur traders. Housed in cabins near the Boundary Waters, students engage in outdoor activities that allow them to experience how Natives and others may have traveled in cold, winter conditions including snowshoe hiking, cross country skiing, and dog sledding.

Student Internships: This offering is open to juniors and seniors only and allows students with a passion or interest in learning more about a specific career, business, or organization the opportunity to spend the January term learning and working in a real-world environment. Each student writes a daily electronic journal detailing their experiences and writes a more formal paper and gives an oral presentation at the end of the experience.

New classes will be offered in subsequent years with the most popular classes repeating every 3-4 years. Two classes involve extended trips and additional fees, but the majority of classes have no fees, while still offering a variety of field trips and other unique activities.

For more information on Elgin Academy or to schedule a tour, call the Admission Office at 847-695-0303 or visit elginacademy.org.

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