



## Education

### The Watson Writes Portfolio

*(These are just a sampling of the dozens of articles written on this subject matter)*

#### **Where innovation meets education: How the Harker School develops unique courses to transform the student experience**

As educational architects, Harker teachers stay highly engaged with students to develop courses that challenge, excite and inspire students to excellence

The intellectual lifeblood of Harker comes from its rigorous selection of passionate teachers, many of whom develop unique course offerings to help students deepen their understanding of engaging topics and be critical thinkers.

“Offering new courses is a win-win. Our students are offered courses that meet the changing needs of our world and that are of greater interest to them, and teachers enjoy creating a new curriculum, which often speaks to their educational background

and unique skillset,” stated assistant head of school for academic affairs, Jennifer Gargano about hiring innovative teachers and encouraging them to bring creativity in unique course development. “Throughout our program, K-12, we believe strongly in customizing our program to meet the diverse learning needs and interests of our students. We have over 800 students in our upper school, each of whom is a unique individual requiring a program that speaks to who they are and meets their needs. To meet those needs, we must have an innovative staff to develop a variety of different disciplines and courses, to inspire students to view the world and issues through the lens of multifaceted perspectives.”

The process to bring such courses from idea to fruition is complex. The teacher first brings the idea to the attention of their department chair, who presents the idea to the division head and to Gargano. Collaboratively, the teacher, the chair, the division head, and Gargano determine if the course fits a need exposing the students to a topic that is not covered by another curriculum.

There are also courses that Harker determines that it needs to offer, either because it needs to respond to topics that students need to be proficient in their understanding of, or that Harker needs further course offerings after determining the learning needs of certain students. In that case, Gargano, along with the division head and department head may approach specific

teachers about creating another course or revising existing courses.

As a result of this process, at Harker, you don't just find "business economics," but also "Corporate Finance" and "Venture Capital and Private Equity." You don't just find "history" but also "Social Justice: Methods and History." In the arts, it is not just "music" but also "Arranging and Composing," while in science, students have "Biomedical Ethnics" to "Forensic Science" from which to choose.

The Harker course development strategy achieves primary outcomes, but also leaves room for teachers to be educational architects to design and deliver learning unique learning experiences.

Harker boasts long-term teacher tenure because of an encouragement of their professional development: When teachers are involved in the process of implementing an educational vision, they are constantly learning and growing. They are constantly reflecting on their teaching practice and seeking out new and innovative ways to deliver instruction.

Harker teachers are all experts in their areas of qualification, but the true factor on why they have been recruited, thrived and stayed at Harker is something deeper and more profound. Elizabeth Brumbaugh, K-12 learning, innovation and design director (LID) and middle school LID director who runs the middle school innovation lab, described it this way, "The thing that has been so central to Harker's success is its hiring process,

being able to identify people who are flexible and who keep the student's overall growth at the center of their hearts."

Brumbaugh's innovation lab is a prime example of a unique opportunity for Harker students to extend beyond what normally might be expected of them. The lab gives students the ability to dig into technology and innovative design further than the computer science classes they are required to take in sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

"The moment I stepped into the classroom, I felt like I was transported into a world of design and creativity. But even more than that, I felt like I had entered a world of collaboration and teamwork," said Valentina Mottl, grade 6.

If a student falls in love with robotics, or circuitry and electronics, they can explore deeper thinking and take a broader look. The lab is equipped with 3D printers, laser and vinyl cutters, sewing machines, circuitry boards, prototyping stations and more. Innovations are guided through a social emotional learning with a constant objective of solving problems and seeking additional levels of problems to solve.

Upper school English teacher Brigid Miller exemplifies an educator who observes, analyzes and then creatively crafts a curriculum to excite and engage students. Emerging from a publishing career, she has been at Harker since 2002. While teaching a senior short fiction course, she noticed that her students were very drawn to the comic book section of an anthology she was using. Riding that interest she saw in her

students, she created a special senior course in English literature called Graphic Narrative. The response to the course, as Miller reports it, was “profound, really.” Students that were mildly interested in American literature, some who were “fairly engaged” morphed into being “in love and can’t stop talking, completely engaged.” She discovered that students interact with the texts in ways students never do in other literature classes. Her class has made a splash with experts in the graphic novel field. “I just had an email the other day from Pranav Mullappalli, class of 2023 who said he's in a course at the University of Indiana and he said, ‘Hey, can I have the syllabus? Because I'm taking a comics class in college and my professor was so jazzed about the idea that I took one already, he couldn't believe it, and he wants to see the syllabus.’ I get emails like that all the time,” she reported.

Jeffrey Yang, class of 2020 also wrote and said, “I'm currently in my senior year at UCLA and had the chance to take an Asian American history class in which we read *They Called Us Enemy*, by George Takei. We recently wrote an essay about this graphic narrative, and I remembered how much I enjoyed your course senior year. I wanted to write to you to thank you and share my appreciation for your styles of teaching because they have really guided me these couple months in college. I still approach all my literature and history classes with the same skills and mindset that you helped me develop across our courses together!!!”

Gloria Zhu from the class of 2022, Lilla Gonzales, class of 2019, and Sophie Wang, class of 2021 are just a few of the others that have emailed similar stories of achieving success and recognition at college due to the Graphics Narrative class. Wang met renowned graphic novelist Alison Bechdel at Yale and reported, “I attended a talk that Alison Bechdel presented at Yale today! After her talk, I spoke with her for a bit about your graphic narrative course and how my research paper was on Are You My Mother? So exciting! I would love to tell you everything! I got a signed copy of her new graphic novel addressed to you! She loves how you're teaching a graphic novel class to high schoolers.”

Harker teachers hone their roles as knowledge explorers by developing deeper, and ultimately more relevant courses of study. Chris Spenner, for example, has been at Harker for 17 years teaching physics. As he dug deeper into research studies, he developed a new course in system science. The course, Systems Science: Health, Sustainability and Justice, was conceived as he taught a Harker summer trip for 10 days each in California and Alaska. “We were looking into all kinds of ecology and sustainability issues. This was not just from a ‘science’ perspective, but multidisciplinary.” Students discussed the variations of tide pool ecosystems in the two geographies and then expanded those principles forward to the human interference into such ecosystems, and the new complexities that resulted.

He was able to leverage the fact that Harker students already took the prerequisites for such a course. It made the concept of offering a more complex look into the field feasible. He was inspired, and Harker administrators gave him the encouragement to create the brand new elective in science called Systems Science: Health, Justice, and Sustainability.

The course is a unique study of ecological systems interfacing with man-made management systems. “It starts with natural complex systems, ecology and organism, level, and even microscopic, and looks at what role complexity plays in determining what we can understand about those systems. What examination we can model and predict and then ultimately, what kind of wisdom we can garner from that and how to manage those systems. After looking at natural systems, the class looked into human nature interfaces,” he explained.

On her own path to increase knowledge exploration on the part of her students, Anu Aiyer, upper school mathematics teacher, was not satisfied just teaching basic statistical theory. The study of statistics can be a foundation for exploring the higher concepts that information theory presents. Statistics is concerned with the collection, analysis, interpretation, presentation, and organization of data. Information Theory, the innovative course Aiyer launched in 2016, is concerned with the quantification and transmission of information. “It is how information is communicated and how it is measured, and

questions whether there are any fundamental sort of limits to storing and communicating information,” she stated.

At Harker for over a decade, Aiyer appreciated the fact that she would not be able to teach such an elevated course without the motivated and curious student body that Harker develops. “I am offering a class I took as a grad student,” she shared.

Inspired at Stanford by a professor who had worked for the California Lottery Board Association to make Lotto run more efficiently, Aiyer wanted to bring Harker students real world applications along with a challenge they might not have been able to take on traditionally. This has proven to serve her graduates well. She receives constant emails that share how, when confronted by similar material presented at colleges and universities, her past students are performing exceptionally well since they are fully versed in the concepts.

Other Harker teachers feel inspired to become critical thinking coaches. Upper school history teacher Mark Janda, in his 14th year teaching at Harker, teaches Social Justice and Ethnic Studies, two new courses that were added in the past 2 years. Having taught in very diverse school populations, Janda was aware that while Harker has broad ethnic diversity, there are pockets of lower economic populations that are not represented. The mission to raise consciousness of social justice within the Harker community, and within the minds of students, has been a driving force for him, which the administration also endorsed. “All my conversations with administrators, parents



and colleagues have been nothing but supportive. Students are excited when they hear of the opportunity.”

The social justice course examines the definitions and principles of social justice and the methods of social justice change. It covers three specific movements: the women’s rights movement, the Civil Rights Movement of the ‘60s, and the LGBTQ movement. “Every teacher has the course they ‘have’ to teach,” said Janda, “But there’s always some facet that gets them excited. I have taught world history for 31 years. The Roman Empire falls the same every year. But social justice and ethnic studies? These are fields that are so dynamic, constantly changing. They are issues that are a passion for me.”

While there is a thrill in teaching a subject that is dynamic and has the potential to evolve in real time as the class is taught, Janda stated that there is a more important aspect that excites him even more – the impact it has on his students’ fulfillment. “I get excited seeing a kid’s self-image transformed by having the opportunity to study their culture or issue within an academic setting. Their parents give them a level of education of course, but it is so important for kids to see themselves in school. With the African American unit, Asian American unit and Latino units, the vast majority of my students are one way or another seeing themselves in a way they never have. I see kids fill up. Some of them truly are depleted, even if they're achieving at a really high level, they're not sure who they are. Here comes something in an academic sense that says, ‘You are

somebody and you have a history, and you have a future,' and that's pretty exciting. It's thrilling then to see kids take those experiences and do something with it."

Janda was particularly gratified hearing from alumni Selin Aras. "When a kid calls and says, 'I'm in college and I took an African American literature course and I think this is going to be my minor,' how can a teacher not be thrilled?" he asks. Elizabeth Fabel, who graduated this year, has been inspired to study gender studies at UCSC from her time in the class.

The course is only in its second year, so its graduates, now juniors in college, have not yet launched fully into the world. Janda knows that when they are ready "that knowing who they are, I would be shocked, shocked, if it does not only become part of who they are, but a career."

As an instructional designer, Sofie Siegmann, middle school art teacher, takes Harker students beyond "art" to the world of ceramics and sculpture. Coming from Europe and well acquainted with classical art traditions, Siegmann's mindset is expansive. Her goal is not to mold students into sculptors, but rather, by delving deep, broadening their perspectives. "Our goal is to make students more of a whole person in every aspect in their being, not just in academics but also emotionally well-rounded," she said. "Usually in middle school you don't have ceramics and sculpture, in particular, sculpture. It is a forgotten art form. In our culture we tend to practice representing the world in one dimension. We start with writing and drawing. We

practice that a lot, but although we are 3D ourselves and we walk through and experience 3D spaces all the time, we don't have a connection with it. I'm very excited that there is a sculpture class to bring that connection. Sculpture has to be done by looking at different planes and angles, rotated around, understanding all the bones and muscle, what muscle makes you laugh for example. It all has to connect in order to create accurately. It is actually very complex.”

Students appreciate the diversity of sculpture mediums Siegmann introduced to them. “The best part of sculpture class is that we work with not only pen and paper, like the visual arts class, and not only clay, like the ceramics class, but also wood and wood burning, wire and even fabric,” reported Shridhar Chaware, grade 8.

Siegmann finds her drive by exploring creativity from her own internal passions. “What I really like about teaching here is that they let me be an artist. I am an artist who likes working with young people and their high energy. Harker lets me figure out, with the students, what is best for them from the unique group dynamic of a given year. The curriculum is art sculpture, but within it, I have so much freedom, which I love as an artist, but it is a challenge that keeps me fresh and on my toes.”

Often Siegmann sees the artistic drive in a student she wants to see launched into the world. “Last year, we did a performance with recycled materials as part of a ‘fashion show’ concept. A student and a partner took chairs, taped them to their feet,

donned big cloaks and stomped through. He said, 'I feel the need to scream' and I said 'Do it, scream!' He was really tall, standing on the stools, and he would then bend down and scream. All I could think was, 'Wow, what an artist, you have that thing in you, I hope you can go be an artist in this world.' Kids like him are a gift, to all of us."

Harker provides a unique environment driven by the school's vision and the passions of both its faculty and its students. That environment demands a constant influx of new and diverse topics and disciplines to prepare students for an evolving world. Harker intends to create unique courses which prepare students to be deep critical thinkers who are socially responsible and able to apply what they learn however it presents itself in their futures.

The courses are designed to optimize student skillsets across many disciplines. Students are also taught the related ethical responsibilities to those disciplines so that they can lead and enact positive changes in their communities and the world.

Assistant Head Gargano drove home the point by making the Harker School vision for teachers very clear, "We educate tomorrow's leaders; we are cognizant of that every day. Our goal is to ensure that our students understand the importance of learning about each discipline, from various perspectives and discussing those ideas through civil discourse. To engage in such conversations, they must have a deep understanding of various areas. By appreciating and trying to understand various

perspectives, our students will ultimately become better and more informed citizens who can contribute to the enactment of positive change and a more peaceful society.”

---

## **Centering Student Voice**

### **Cultivating Emotionally Intelligent Educators and Culturally Responsive Classrooms**

As pre-service teachers, educators, pre-service teachers, and administrators start their professional journey, they often find themselves walking into buildings steeped in educational accomplishment. The

typical school building brims with stories of success, brilliance, and creativity. New educators and veteran teachers alike are high in anticipation to hear the voice of eager students.

Until that eager voice spews words of disrespect, acts out indescribable behaviors, and releases emotions that are difficult to understand.

This was an experience of the author, Dr. Glover. As Glover, faced this, one of many similar spontaneous

responses to learning situations, it was evident that her own lifelong mission, her dreams, her passion as

a teacher needed to be re-energized to meet the challenge in front of her.

She envisioned the path on which her particular class at the time was aspiring. Without some dramatic intervention, her students were not destined for scholastic and life achievements, they were being groomed for negative life outcomes or prison.

**That is not a joke.**

**She knew that to alter this path, she, educators, pre-service teachers, and administrators with similar realizations, needed to be disrupters.**

**Centering Student Voice is the guide that helps educators and school administrations impact and inspire**

**the young people in their charge. Its goal is to impact the three “Ds”: Distraction, disengagement, and discipline. Voice takes the reader through a process using emotional intelligence to break through and interrupt disruptive issues in which the educator and scholar co-construct the classroom community together.**

**Centering Student Voice references young people as “scholars” as opposed to “students” throughout its**

**text. While young people may be the learners of academia and educational knowledge, and in that sense, “students”, they are the experts of their own experiences and therefore, “scholars.”**

**In Voice, when the scholar and their educational disrupter come together and focus on learning challenges collaboratively, the experiences that are having a negative impact on the scholar’s success can be understood. The unintended consequences of those experiences can then be challenged and overcome.**

**Centering Student Voice recognizes the power of the educator. Presenting a program of concepts and strategies, the book redirects the educator from limiting preconceptions to a broader thought process, cultural awareness, and empathy. This new approach will develop and sustain the equitable and inclusive classroom in which learning will cease being a belabored painful unsuccessful process, but a standard and expected practice.**

**Voice is not just a book of academic theory. It is a tactical roadmap with exercises and critical connection points that can move an educator beyond philosophical agreement to integrating positive “disruptive” practices into their real-world classrooms.**

**Pre-service teachers, educators, pre-service teachers, and principals bring a unique passion to the table**

**full of intent to develop young people into knowledgeable and skilled adults. When educators and administrations are faced with what appears to be resistance, disinterest, and disengagement, their**

passion to inspire can start to wane. With the use of emotional intelligence tools, educators and administrators can re-ignite that passion. To accomplish that, they must embrace the concept that they

are affecting a diverse group of individuals who are forming their own identities and genius. As educators become aware that their young people hold uniqueness, the path to success becomes different and exciting. The educator and administrator can disrupt destructive or unproductive reactions

to learning. They can position the learning to be received by young people yearning to be their authentic

selves. This allows the scholars to integrate the learning into their own multi-faceted cultural settings or

personal diversities.

By following the strategy presented in Centering Student Voice, educators become disrupters of negative outcomes. Pre-service teachers, educators, pre-service teachers, and administrators can then not only embrace their own passion mission of impacting lives, but contribute to society in a way that no other profession ever can or ever will.

Centering Student Voice: Cultivating Emotionally Intelligent Educators and Culturally Responsive Classrooms is the guide that can make pre-service teachers and educators accomplished knowledge and

skill absorption facilitators. It is the guide to make sure that students can be understood, educated, and

empowered to live with authenticity, to become self-advocates and to continue through life as active lifelong learners.

---

## **Exhilarate Your Teaching Staff to Excellence**

Introducing a Four Tier Workshop Program Designed to Inspire your teaching staff to thrive

Your challenge:

☑ According to studies, 25% of your students are suffering from stress and anxiety disorders. Their

mental state creates a “chicken or the egg” paradox in the classroom. Student disposition helps create teacher burnout, and teacher burnout feeds student stress and anxiety.

☒ 50% of your teaching staff considered leaving last year.

☒ 90% of your new hire recruitment is to fill positions of teachers who did leave.

☒ The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that more than 270,000 teachers have left the profession each year since 2016 and projects this rate of departure to continue through 2026.

☒ Teacher burnout is evident in several key symptoms. Those include self-doubt, withdrawal, loss of inspiration and constant fatigue.

Solving the problem: Studies have shown that giving teachers a sense of empowerment and a confident self-respect deals a significant blow against burnout. It is imperative for education leaders to enhance teachers’ coping skills to rectify the problem. The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence has published research that has shown that teachers with developed emotional skills experience dramatically less burnout. Those skills include accurate emotional recognition, understanding both the causes of one’s emotions and their consequences, and how to regulate and comfortably express emotions.

Introducing the Ilana Ingber Thriving Teachers

Workshop Initiative

Call today for your free needs analysis consultation session.

301.704.8996

[www.ilanaingber.com](http://www.ilanaingber.com)

Schedule a conversation

(Panel two)

About Ilana Ingber Coaching: Ilana Ingber brings over a decade of experience as an Education Professional. She is a highly regarded certified leadership coach who has strong reputation inspiring school teachers and education leaders. Her work has shifted schools from being stress factories to learning sanctuaries where everyone’s well being matters. She has affected the lives of thousands of students and authored curriculums for the fastest growing network of charter schools in the country. Ilana’s approach with teachers is not theoretical. She has been in their shoes. She has taught in classes



fully aware that mindful well-being was a vital foundation she should have. She however, herself, fell into feelings of exhaustion, depression, and anxiety. A dire personal family tragedy shook her sense of perspective and priorities profoundly, and she developed a unique and powerful set of coping mechanisms as a result. Since that time, she has been able to incorporate the principles she learned into powerful motivational talks, workshops and coaching curriculums that have reinvigorated numerous teaching professionals.

The principles of the Ilana Ingber Thriving Teachers Workshop Initiative are delivered in four customizable formats. You can build your specific program from one consisting of motivational talks, to workshop programs, to full coaching and accountability transformations.

At the end of the program, teachers will walkaway with the following principles:

- ☑ How to identify their relationship to burnout
- ☑ What their overwhelm cycle is, and how to break the pattern
- ☑ A clarity of their mission
- ☑ How to increase their personal wellbeing during the school day
- ☑ How to set healthy boundaries
- ☑ How to “down regulate” and affect their body’s neurological reaction to stress
- ☑ How to create, value and experience fun as a significant part of their day

#### Program Details

The program is modular and customized to your specific needs. You can construct a deliverable plan based on the following components:

1. A 30-minute motivational talk by Ilana Ingber. This talk will raise consciousness and motivation amongst your teaching staff, or school district. It can be delivered in a Zoom presentation, or in person (travel and logistic costs extra).
2. Professional Development Workshops. These workshops are motivational and give solid instruction to teachers on the identification of their stressors. The workshop takes them through the construction of an action plan, exercises on how to implement wellness tools, and a self-accountability process to take forward.
3. Group Coaching. Group coaching sessions can take your teachers from a theoretical understanding of the principles to full implementation in their daily lives. The coaching sessions

provide greater insights into the material, constant follow up on goals and action plans and management of the accountability process.

4. One-on-one coaching. This is the most intensive hands-on application for teachers who are either the most motivated to enact a change, or for those who feel the most lost and need unique attention.

Custom-tailored programs are available as well

n