

**FAQS:**

**SCHOLARS ACADEMY  
FOR THE GIFTED AND  
ARTISTICALLY ELITE  
@ CARY BALLET CONSERVATORY**

**CREATED BY: DR. LAURA LOWDER,  
ACADEMY DIRECTOR & INSTRUCTOR**

**DO YOU WANT TO ... ?**

**THRIVE  
ACADEMICALLY,  
SOCIALY, AND  
EMOTIONALLY  
WHILE TRAINING  
AS A PRE-  
PROFESSIONAL  
DANCER**

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**#SCHOLARSACADEMYATCARYBALLETT**

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**#ADVANCEDCURRICULUM**

**#LEARNGROWANDTHRIVE**

**#PERFECTLYSCHEDULEDAROUNDPTP**

**#LEARNFROMLEADINGEDUCATORS**

**#BLENDEDLEARNINGWORKS**

**#ACCELERATIONOFLEARNING**

**#BUILDINGGOODPEOPLE**

**#21STCENTURYSKILLS**

**#EMPATHYBUILDINGOPPORTUNITIES**

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## **NOTICE OF NONDISCRIMINATORY POLICY AS TO STUDENTS**

The Scholars Academy for the Gifted and Artistically Elite admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It doesn't discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarships, or other school-administered programs.

# THE SCHOLARS ACADEMY MISSION

**The Scholars Academy for the Gifted and Artistically Elite's mission is to actively listen to and learn about the educational and humanistic desires of each family for their scholar, to then work to innovate a creative pedagogical solution to support the short and long-range goals utilizing a blended learning framework with myriad curricular resources, and to facilitate character growth and learning through personalized teaching, tutoring, and dispositional support.**

# 1.

## BLENDING LEARNING-SAY WHAT?

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**Y**ou may be wondering about this term, “blended learning” and why it seems to be such a big deal for the Scholars Academy for the Gifted and Artistically Elite. Dr. Lowder, the academy’s founder and director, has spent much of her graduate research at the University of Florida and her teaching career studying the art of effectively blending technology tools within the art of teaching and learning.

These days, our access to content via technology is all-but limitless. Holding true to the developmental, pedagogical, and experiential basis of what makes “good teaching” effective, Dr. Lowder has developed this innovative, unique, blended learning program that combines the flexibility of self-pacing and access to instructional content that is available from various online curriculum providers with the powerful, student-centered, enriching, opportunities for critical thinking, problem-solving, and perspective-building that occurs when scholars interact personally in time and space with master teachers.

## **EDUCATION FOR THE INDIVIDUAL; NOT THE AVERAGARIAN.**

Tod Rose explains in his book, “The End of Average,” that just like a cock pit built for an average person is a cock pit built for nobody, schools built for average pupils are schools that are just right for little to none of its pupils. Our academy has been created to counter this commonplace error by designing a learning program built directly around the scheduling needs of our pre-professional artists while

considering the academic, social, and emotional needs of each individual human being in our classrooms.

So, what does blended learning look like for our scholars at the academy? Scholars in our academy spend about three hours each morning and ninety minutes each afternoon engaged in a combination of face-to-face and synchronous teacher-led courses with academy faculty and asynchronous online coursework that they move through at their own pace. This combination of ways in which our learners interact with the myriad content and instructors results in opportunities for our students to accelerate in areas of strength and receive just-right teaching in all areas of their curriculum. In addition, students receive the in-person, real-time support across content areas that they need to ensure successful acquisition of learning. Our students feel empowered, in control, and build self-efficacy as a result.

For additional information about why families choose blended learning programs, you may be interested in checking out this report from The Foundation for Blended and Online Learning. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED589983.pdf>



## 2.

# WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR ADMITTANCE? ARE ALL SCHOLARS ACADEMY STUDENTS “GIFTED”?

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**T**he Scholars Academy for the Gifted and Artistically Elite teaches the human beings in our program using what experience and research has taught us to be best-practices for teaching and learning. As a professional educator for eighteen years, I have found all students to have one thing in common...if we (the teachers and parents of our students) truly believe in them, hold them to high expectations, and work as a team, all of our students will achieve success. This isn't just a coincidence and it hasn't happened with the thousands of students I have taught just because I happen to be a great teacher. Nope. That's not it. This is a part of the science of teaching. This pattern of success can be explained by a phenomenon called the self-fulfilling prophecy. I believe this prophecy gives power to each and every single teacher to make or break a student's academic outcomes during the student's time in the teacher's class. I prefer to take advantage of this socio-psychological phenomenon and use it to work for the good of humanity.

## **STRATEGIES THAT WORK WELL FOR GIFTED LEARNERS WORK WELL FOR ALL LEARNERS.**

In addition to the power of the self-fulfilling prophecy, strategies for gifted learners work well for all children. Gifted learners are unique creatures with a variety of needs, just like all learners. Gifted learners need support, guidance, and

opportunities to consider differing perspectives, to learn about different human beings and their cultures. These special scholars need love, fairness, understanding, and opportunities to build and show these attributes to others in their lives. They need to think deeply, to build strategies for making sense of those thoughts, and to be empowered to do great things both in and out of the classroom.

So, do our students have to have been identified as “gifted” or “AIG” to be accepted into the academy? Absolutely not. Will all students be held to high accountability, work ethic, behaviors, dispositions, attitudes, and learning goals? Absolutely, YES! I encourage you to entrust your scholar, whose perspectives and values are at a pinnacle point in their development, to our program. I will intentionally utilize the self-fulfilling prophecy as well as my toolbox of teaching tools, my shelves and shelves of research and educational readings, and my tried and true strategies for facilitating learning to support your scholar as he or she seeks to grow and thrive academically while developing dispositions that will allow him or her to continue thriving for the good of the human race throughout his or her life.

This brings me to another important FAQ...(see # 3).

# 3.

## I AM NERVOUS ABOUT MY SON OR DAUGHTER'S ABILITY TO MANAGE SUCH HIGH EXPECTATIONS WHILE TRAINING AND (FOR MANY) LIVING AWAY FROM HOME FOR THE FIRST TIME. HOW CAN I PROTECT MY SCHOLAR FROM FAILURE?

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**I**t's all about expectations with love, support, honestly, and room to grow. Remember back to your own time as a teenager. I imagine none of us made it through this time of astronomical growth without at least a few imperfect moments. Our scholars are the same way. It is developmentally appropriate and normal (expected, even) for pre-teens, teenagers, and young adults to run into trials and tribulations (and sometimes less than permissible behavior) during this time of their lives. Having such special opportunities and expectations does not prevent them from having to work their way through some of these situations. Rest assured, the faculty and staff at Cary Ballet Conservatory, the Scholars Academy, and the residence and host parents are all here to serve as a full support team for each one of our students. We will lovingly, yet consistently, enforce the expectations while providing scaffolding and support for any improvements that might be needed. This brings me to this FAQ #3...PLEASE remember that your child

needs to see us working together as a team in support of him or her. When the going gets tough, it will be clear, respectful, and honest communication amongst us all that will lead to the least painful, swiftest opportunity for our scholars to growth in character and discipline and get right back on the right track. We understand this and want to work together with you during the best of times and, sometimes, also during the not-so-best of times for your child. If your scholar makes a mistake, please remember that your support of us as we hold him or her accountable will go far beyond anything that we can say or do without your support. The fastest way to run a kid into a hole is to disempower a committed teacher. Just as soon as disempowerment through an unsupportive parent occurs, we have lost the student and he/she is no longer motivated or engaged to thrive in or outside of our classrooms.

## **OUR SCHOLARS SUCCEED & GROW IN SCHOOL AND IN LIFE WHEN PARENTS & TEACHERS ARE CONSISTENT & SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER, EVEN DURING THE TOUGH MOMENTS.**

So, please do not be too nervous for your scholar. Are they going to be perfect? I really hope not, because these are the years for trying situations and growing; while they have adults in their corners to help them to learn and grow. These are the years for these trials and tribulations. We will hold them accountable, yes, but we understand the ages and stages of our students and we will support them as they develop into competent, kind, dependable, critically thinking, problem-solving, ready-for-their-world young adults. We look forward to working together as a team to help your dancer-scholar to thrive this year.

# 4.

## IS THREE HOURS A DAY REALLY ENOUGH TIME FOR MY SCHOLAR TO LEARN? WHAT DOES THE DAILY SCHEDULE LOOK LIKE? HOW DOES THE SCHOOL DAY FLOW?

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Each morning, beginning at 8:00 A.M. our scholars engage in a variety of learning opportunities in the academic classroom ranging from social-emotional sessions, book clubs, writing lessons, science labs at the collegiate level, online lessons, small group lessons, to tutoring support. At about 10:45 A.M., scholars are released to transition to their 11:00 A.M. ballet classes. At about 1:30 P.M., students enjoy a social lunch with their peers in the Cary Ballet cafe or out on the patio. From 2:00-3:45 P.M. scholars engage in independent online coursework, read an assigned chapter for book clubs, work on a paper, or work with a peer through a challenging lesson. Throughout the week, most students have rehearsals during this mid-afternoon block of time. Students schedule their afternoon school work around their scheduled rehearsals. At about 4:00 P.M., students return to the studios for afternoon ballet class. At about 5:30 P.M., they are finished for the day and return to the residence for relaxation, dinner, time with friends and/or family, and time to simply “be a kid”. No more long nights of homework after long days at school and long evenings at dance. The day is power-packed so that the evenings can be a time to achieve balance.

Occasionally students may have a bit of reading or a bit of homework to complete. Outside of reading, this is typically

only after a missed academics session and/or a decision not to fully engage in independent work during the mid-afternoon. This is a part of the expected process of learning self-regulation and is okay. We encourage, and continue to expect, scholars to manage their time such that they complete everything before leaving the studio for the evening.

Of course, there are some exceptions. Our upper-grades students who are enrolled in college courses for dual credit may, indeed, need to spend some of their evening time engaged in their studies.

We hope that our creative scheduling during the day will limit the need to spend countless hours working at home, even for our highest level students.

**IT MAKES THE FACULTY AT CARY BALLET  
HAPPY TO SEE THE IMPACT THAT OUR  
CREATIVE SCHEDULING CAN HAVE TOWARDS  
ACHIEVING A BALANCED DAILY AND WEEKLY  
LIFE FOR EACH OF OUR STUDENTS.**

It makes us happy to see the impact that this opportunity for a balanced daily and weekly schedule can have on each of our students. We hope you will notice the difference, too. So, join us, and enjoy your kid more this year! Whether it be in person or via FaceTime, we hope you will join us and enjoy seeing your kid get to be a kid with our unique fully supportive and balanced program.

# 5.

## ARE ALL PTP DANCERS ENROLLED IN THE ACADEMY? IF A STUDENT IS USING A DIFFERENT ONLINE PROGRAM, ARE YOU INVOLVED IN THEIR ACADEMICS?

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**T**his question is a very important one. Most of the PTP dancers who reside in the residence for training in the PTP are enrolled in our academic program. We also have a great group of local students enrolled in academics as well, who live in the Cary area and are in the PTP. Other local PTP dancers choose to attend public school options. Mrs. Mariaelena and I designed the academic program to be an integral piece to the full-service, "live, learn, and train", setting. Our daily, weekly, and holiday schedule, as well as the travel calendar to accommodate competitions like YAGP, ADC, and NYC Finals are all built to align perfectly and to support the overall balance that our incredibly engaged students need with their rigorous training. It is our strong recommendation that PTP students from out-of-town enroll in both the PTP and the Scholars Academy so that they are in the best situation to be fully supported and, thus, to maximize their potential for success without tremendous stress throughout the year. We want our dancers to thrive in every way. For example, students have a reduced school load during days when they have dress rehearsals, performances, and travel. We also avoid scheduling exams during these times and are careful to limit other due dates as well. The academic program is an integral piece of our plan that we encourage very strongly so that we can maintain these kinds

of support structures in place throughout the dance year. We also recommend that local students enroll in the Scholars Academy, for these same reasons.

In an effort to keep the focus of the Scholars Academy faculty on the facilitation of teaching and learning among our scholars, we are not able to provide academic services to students who are not enrolled in the program. In unique circumstances, we will consider doing what we can to accommodate students in other online programs but this type of scenario almost always risks resulting in a student working mostly in isolation with very little interaction with peers during the academic sessions. Though we very much want to provide support to all of our PTP students, we must ensure that our focus and energy remain consistent for our Academy students; particularly during the academic sessions.

With that being said, we sometimes have availability for private tutoring outside of the academic schedule (evening, late afternoons, weekends).



# 6.

## WHAT CLASSES DO THE ACADEMY STUDENTS TAKE WITH THE ACADEMY FACULTY AND WHAT CLASSES DO THEY TAKE INDIVIDUALLY AND SELF-PACED?

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**T**his year, 20-21, our Scholars Academy faculty will be teaching “The Power of Positivity: Attitude is Everything,” Honors Literature: Examination of Timeless and Universal Themes Through Literature, Honors Composition: Writing Within the Content Areas and Creative Writing, 21st Century Skill Development, Honors History: Issues and Ideas Affecting Real People, and Honors Science Lab. Additionally, an optional Honors Dance History course will be offered for the first time. Students at some levels can choose whether they will take math taught by the faculty or an online math class that is self-paced.

In addition to the face-to-face and blended, synchronous classes, students will select individual, mostly online, courses to complete their schedules such as foreign language, health, social studies, science, and math offered at the general, remedial, honors, and often, AP levels. The faculty of the Scholars Academy are the teachers of record for these classes and coordinate assignments within the online courses based on student learning needs.

11th and 12th grade students have opportunities to enroll in college courses with our partner schools for dual high school and college credit.

All students receive tutorial-like support for their classes.

Academy students also earn dance performance and technique elective credit for their engagement in the professional training program (PTP).

## 7.

## HOW WILL THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS OF MY SCHOLAR BE SUPPORTED?

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**T**his year, we have contracted with a dedicated college and career counselor who also happens to hold a BA in Psychology and a MA in Counseling.

Ms. Caroline Sowards is currently working towards a Ph.D. in Psychology. Ms. Caroline will be holding weekly class sessions with our scholars throughout the 20-21 academic year. She will serve as a mentor and a support person throughout the ebbs and flows of the social, emotional, and academic needs of each one of our scholars. We know that our gifted artists feel deeply, sometimes hurt deeply, live passionately, and are often perfectionistic, sometimes disorganized, and often times have trouble being flexible with themselves and others. Meanwhile the physical and mental demands of a rigorous dance training program combined with the expectations that our scholars place on themselves can often feel overwhelming. Ms. Caroline will be our counselor in residence to provide professional support for our academy scholars in the form of instruction of techniques and strategies for success and coping through challenging times in their unique lives. Ms. Sowards will also be available for private, individual social-emotional support sessions for any of our Scholars Academy dancers who may need some additional support at any time throughout the year.



Mrs. Caroline Sowards  
Social and Emotional Support Counselor  
Scholars Academy for the Gifted and Artistically Elite

**8.**

## **IS COLLEGE PREPARATION SUPPORT IN PLACE FOR UPPER-LEVEL STUDENTS?**

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Our addition of Mrs. Sowards as our college and career counselor is exclusively for our Academy scholars and her role will also support the college planning process for our

students. In addition to the weekly+ social and emotional sessions that Caroline will lead with all students, she will also be having college planning sessions to help structure the process of explorations and, as 12th graders, applications, etc. As for the College Board exams like the PSAT, SAT, and ACT, we have our application in process with ETS in hopes that we will receive approval to be able to administer these exams on-site. If this is confirmed prior to the early August deadline to order PSAT testing materials, we will offer this exam at the Scholars Academy (at Cary Ballet) this fall. We are hopeful to receive approval. If you wish for your scholar to be included on this registration list, please let me know at the time of registration and I will contact you once we hear back from ETS and the College Board.

**9.**

## **HOW ARE UPPER LEVEL SCHOLARS SUPPORTED AS THEY PREPARE FOR TRANSITION INTO HIGHER EDUCATION?**

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**11**th and 12th grades are wonderful years for our students and years that we engage in with intent as an opportunity to begin the transition from high school to higher education experiences. Our upper-grades Academy students (11th and 12th graders) have some choices and opportunities unique to these grade levels. Schedules for these scholars include a combination of classes that students work through online as well as a set of interactive classes that our faculty teach. Some examples of our

interactive classes include science labs (taught at the freshman college level), book studies, writing instruction, mindfulness-type lessons, etc. We also encourage a dual-enrollment planning session to determine the readiness and interest level of each of our upper-grades students and we work with our partners to provide these opportunities if the interest is there for a student. It truly is a nice balance of rigor, opportunities for self-pacing in some areas, and classroom-based academic interactions that build on a critical skillset for our scholars' futures in dance companies, colleges, and/or careers.



## FINAL WORDS FROM DR. LOWDER :)

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Each student brings unique gifts to our learning environment. I pledge to work with each student to set goals and, together, we will aim towards successfully achieving what he or she has set out for, with minor revision of goals along the way, occasionally, if needed. I will act as a true facilitator of not only the gaining of conceptual understanding of new content, but also as a facilitator of progress among my students. I believe that learning skills must be supported by self-regulation skills to scaffold future success as an eventual student of higher education, in a dance company, and in life. I am committed to the success of each one of our students and I look forward to meeting each unique individual of our 20-21 Scholars Academy for the Gifted and Artistically Elite class.