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Learning Beyond the Classroom

At **Nazareth Academy**, a wide variety of clubs, activities, and athletics teach young women valuable life lessons and help them discover their passions.

A typical day in the life of a high school student is filled with fantastic discovery, as they go from interpreting a Shakespearean play to solving an algebraic equation to studying Earth's various ecosystems in the span of just a few hours.

High school is a time for them to gain more knowledge about the world around them and about themselves as they prepare for the next step. The finest institutions understand that learning is not restricted to the classroom; it does not stop when the bell rings at the end of the school day.

Nazareth Academy, the only private, Catholic high school for young women in Philadelphia, has thrived for nearly a century because of its dedication to helping young women grow academically, socially, and spiritually. Such growth comes in part through a wide variety of extracurricular activities and athletics. With more than 40 clubs and 12 sports to choose from, students



are encouraged to participate in formative experiences that have the potential to shape the rest of their lives.

“Our job is to empower our students to go on and do amazing things,” says Theresa Hartey, Assistant Principal for Student Life at Nazareth. “They’re definitely learning about new opportunities here and then pursuing them in the future. It even works on the flip side; maybe they thought something was for them, and as they experience it, they realize it’s not for them. That in and of itself is a valuable experience.”

Research has shown that extracurricular activities and athletics help students develop self-confidence and focus more intently on their studies, as well as develop skills such as leadership, teamwork, and time management. There are certainly plenty of opportunities to do so at Nazareth, with a club for seemingly every hobby or interest imaginable. If a certain club is not available, students can always start one.

“Students can propose a new club at Nazareth by going through a process where they write a formal proposal, they talk about the rationale behind the proposed club and how many times they’re going to meet,” Hartley adds. “They must recruit their own moderator from among the faculty and staff. Just in the last week, we had one student who wanted to start a gaming club and another who wanted to start an anime club. It’s good for them to go out and do the groundwork.”

Some of the more popular clubs at Nazareth include Pandas Stand Up, a domestic violence awareness group; Student Council; Athletes Helping Athletes, which is focused on assistance for special-needs students in certain activities or sports; Pandas for the Planet, which works on environmental pursuits; and Naz News, a morning news broadcast. Other clubs encourage interest in fields that have long been male-dominated, such as rocketry and robotics. The Rocketry Team attended a national competition in Virginia last year and was invited to sit down with the head of NASA.

“It was an unbelievable experience for them,” Hartey says. “It’s just so exciting to see the girls, after they graduate, go on to science careers. Their interest and enthusiasm were born from the time they spent in these particular clubs. They feel like there are no boundaries for them, which is exactly what we want.”

Some clubs are just centered on fun or pop culture, like the Star Wars Club or Harry Potter Literary Club. Others have a service component, with girls packaging bags for the Breathing Room Foundation, volunteering at a soup kitchen, or tutoring elementary school students. Naz-A-Thon is a popular club that works on fundraising all year leading up to a 12-hour dance marathon in



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the spring in support of Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), with a staggering \$100,000 or more generated for a different CHOP endeavor each year.

“From my vantage point, it’s such a joy to work with these young women,” Hartey says. “They’re amazing, they work very hard, and they’re eager to learn. They’re very community-oriented, they look out for one another, and they definitely have a sense of Nazareth family that you pick up on as soon as you walk through the door.”

That sisterhood is evident in longstanding traditions such as Freshman Week, in which seniors and freshmen are paired together and

dress according to a different theme each day. It all leads to a freshman pageant at the end of the week and serves as a nice welcome for first-year students.

Camaraderie and school spirit also shine through in the Nazareth athletics program. While club and AAU teams outside of school have grown in recent years, there is still an appeal to competing alongside close friends at Nazareth.

“You can always go to a different club, and student-athletes often jump from club to club,” says Dan Bradley, the longtime Athletic Director, and head girls’ soccer coach at Nazareth. “I feel that in high school, you’re playing for more than a college scholarship—you’re playing for school pride. I always say that we’re an extension of the classroom—the values, the life lessons, all of that carries over to athletics. Students might not understand it now, but in 10 years, they’re going to realize the importance of what their coaches are teaching them.”

With 12 different varsity and junior varsity sports, Nazareth offers something for everyone in each season. The school has also talked about expanding, with bowling, flag football, and field hockey among the possible new offerings in the near future.

“I think having some diversity with the sports program is great because it gives opportunities to girls who don’t play soccer or basketball to go try something like tennis or golf,” Bradley says. “Those are sports they can really play forever, and we always try to push them. Our numbers for golf are 15 to 20 every year, and some of those are girls who never played before, but after four years, they’re playing rounds with their dads.”

Nazareth is currently a member of the Athletic Association of Catholic Academies, but next year will join the Philadelphia Catholic League, where it will get to compete regularly with rivals Archbishop Ryan and St. Hubert. The Pandas will surely have success in their new athletic home, but more importantly will continue to use sports as a way to bond and show support for one another.

That is likely to last after graduation as well. Bradley shares that it is quite common for former players to come back and cheer on the current teams, and he is always thrilled to welcome them back and see how far they have grown.

“Championships and awards are great,” he says, “but at the end of the day, it’s what they do when they leave here that is really important.” ■

→ Nazareth Academy High School

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