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The many experiences available to **Germantown Academy** students help them thrive in the classroom and become well-rounded, community-minded citizens of the world. page 18

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Getting the Most Out of Education

The many experiences available to **Germantown Academy** students help them thrive in the classroom and become well-rounded, community-minded citizens of the world.

by **MATT COSENTINO** | photo by **JODY ROBINSON**

Germantown Academy (GA) senior Jennifer Fox is a two-sport athlete who stars in basketball and will continue to play in college. She is also a pianist and completed a course in songwriting during her sophomore year, which allowed her to perform original material in the school's recording studio. A talented creative writer as well, she serves in a leadership role for *Academy Monthly*, GA's literary magazine featuring student-created short stories, poetry, and photography.

"I love the amount of options I have," says Fox, who has attended GA since fifth grade. "I have a lot of interests as a person—I like sports, I like reading, I love art—and every single one of the things that I enjoy doing is offered here in some shape or form. It's just really nice that whatever I want to do, there always seems to be something for me to find."

An aspiring doctor, Fox plans to study biology next year at Franklin & Marshall College. She fits the mold of a "typical" GA student: someone who has achieved academic excellence and also wants to make a positive difference in the world. After all, throughout its history GA has nurtured an educational model that focuses on developing the whole person, not just academic success.

Participation in two activities per year is a requirement, though most students embrace it because of all the difference-making programs available to them. Athletics is high on the list, which should come as no surprise considering GA's place in the highly competitive Inter-Ac League.

GA boasts a robust performing arts department as well, where students can build a strong foundation in music, drama, theater production, or public speaking. From learning the fundamentals of vocal and instrumental performance to exploring the technical artistry of stagecraft, students are encouraged to discover their passions both on stage and behind the scenes. The program not only develops artistic skills but also cultivates creativity, confidence, and collaboration—qualities that extend far beyond the theater and into every area of their academic and personal lives.

"One of the most exciting developments has been the overlap between athletics and theater," notes Head of Upper School Dave Samson. "Last year, for example, several athletes—particularly football players—participated in *Mamma Mia*. I am proud of that and encouraged to see students exploring different opportunities, as that is truly what high school should be about."

The number of clubs at GA is seemingly endless, and students are constantly starting new ones. These include opportunities to serve the community, both on campus—Fox has taken part in programs teaching and reading to kindergarten students—and off; options include everything from volunteering in senior communities to helping clean up the Wissahickon Creek.

Then there's the Academy Scholars program, in which students who are passionate about a certain subject can conduct independent research under the guidance of a faculty sponsor and work on a personal project. Examples include writing a children's book, composing an album, conducting a science experiment, or implementing an advocacy campaign.

These various programs all share a common focus: developing well-rounded students.

"A lot of our faculty have read the book *Never Enough* by Jennifer [Breheny] Wallace, and one of the things she talks about is this term 'mattering' and the idea that kids who thrive and who bounce back from adversity are kids who know that they matter," Samson says. "Our faculty and staff know and value every kid and build relationships with them, so they know they are valued. If they are doing something else outside of the GA curriculum that is meaningful, it helps their confidence and self-esteem."

Fox has definitely gotten the most out of her GA experience. She recalls being somewhat hesitant when her parents first suggested the school to give her more of a challenge, but now she cannot imagine having gone anywhere else.

"You find your people here," she says. "I know that's kind of a cliché, but I found my people within the first two weeks, and it was really nice to be instantly accepted by so many people. I've spent so much of my time in one place, and it's a little weird to think that I'm going to be leaving soon. But I know we will be keeping in touch." ■



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