



# International Education in Greece

VIEWES FROM THE INSTITUTIONS

## American Community Schools of Athens

Innovation, Collaboration and Bridging the High School – University Experience: one example of educational metamorphosis in practice

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In a world defined by rapid transformation, all schools must embrace change and prepare their students to adapt to and thrive in shifting circumstances. Now more than ever, schools must instill a sense of confidence in students that they have the tools and the power to identify, evaluate and choose from among all of the options and opportunities that a constantly changing world presents them.

ACS Athens' approach to innovation and change is anchored in the idea of *metamorphosis*, a holistic vision of change rooted in solid values, ethics and principles, which calls upon members of the learning community constantly to reexamine and reflect upon all aspects of the school's operations. This means rethinking and redefining the ways that teaching and learning happen in and out of the classroom; redefining roles and relationships among students, teachers, administrators, staff and parents; and seeing and seizing opportunities that can arise from forging relationships between ACS Athens and the world outside.

Leading innovation in education, ACS Athens has actively reached out to establish collaborative relationships with leading colleges and universities in an on-going effort to bridge the gap between the high school and college experiences for its students, to expand post-high school options for its students and to help them choose wisely from among available options. In the past four years ACS Athens, the Office of Student Services and the Institute for Innovation and Creativity have worked to establish a variety of partnerships, and university collaborations have taken many forms.

The first order of business has been simply to reach out to university admissions officers – to introduce them to the ACS program and the school's holistic, meaningful and harmonious approach to teaching and learning. To this end, members of the administration, faculty and counseling staff have met personally with over 300 admissions officers from schools in North America, Europe and Asia,



establishing positive relationships that help us to promote our students, and which can serve as the foundation for further collaborative endeavors.

ACS Athens has brought the university to its campus in three summer learning institutes in 2006-2008. Professors from Tufts University, Williams College and York University, working with members of the ACS faculty led two-week intensive, interdisciplinary and project-based classes (in International Relations, Mathematics and Creativity, and Theater) for talented ACS Athens students. Taking advantage of the historical and cultural sites of Greece, the summer programs were exceptional learning and growth experiences for the student participants, who excelled in university-level courses, as well as for the ACS Athens and university faculty who partnered to teach them.

Reflecting on this experience, the school next sought to expand it, by providing students with an opportunity not only to do university level work, but to experience college life and US culture firsthand. Thus, was born the ACS Athens partnership with the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond. Working with Jepson's chief administrators and a senior professor in the field, the two institutions (a JK-12 school and a university) created the Summer Leadership Institute. Combining one week of study in Athens, one week of university classes (and field study at Monticello, the University of Virginia and around Richmond) – team



taught by ACS Athens and Richmond faculty – and one week of field study in Washington, DC, the Leadership Institute reversed the process established in the previous Summer Institutes by bringing the students to the university and to the culture in which they planned to study. ACS Athens and the University of Richmond have concluded two successful Summer Leadership Institutes and look forward to the third in 2011. ACS Athens is currently in negotiations with the Dodge School of Film Studies at Chapman University in California to establish a second summer program, modeled on the University of Richmond prototype, focused on the theme of mass media, film and TV production.

Building on the desire to provide students with as much information about and experience of university life as possible, ACS Athens has also established a successful program of week-long college/university visits in the US (involving 13 Boston area schools) and in the UK (involving 12 London area schools). Led by ACS Athens faculty, these visits give student participants the opportunity to know the institutions first hand by meeting with admissions officers, touring campuses, meeting with students (ACS Athens alumni whenever possible) and attending classes. As they debrief the visits with the tour leaders, students come to under-

stand the myriad elements that make particular schools a "good fit" for their abilities, talents, interests and personalities.

Pushing ahead with its commitment to leading innovation in education, ACS Athens has embarked this year on yet another avenue of collaboration designed to bridge the gap. With firm belief in the quality of its educational program, the school has reached out to selected US colleges and universities by asking them to enter into agreements that specify exactly the university credit that students can earn for work completed at ACS Athens. While US institutions generally award credit for successful completion of AP and IB courses, the school is asking them to take a look at four authentic, interdisciplinary ACS Athens-developed courses (Humanities, Leadership Studies, The Heart of Mathematics and Knot Theory), which are of equal academic caliber, with an eye to awarding our students university credit for work done in these classes. This move is in line with ACS Athens' firm commitment to providing choices and alternatives for its students, to allow them to build the best program that meets their individual academic and intellectual needs. The ACS Athens proposal is a challenge to the institutions the school approaches to look at its program in a more holistic way and outside of the limits of traditional categories; it also stands a challenge to the ACS Athens community itself to understand that there are many routes to excellence and that the school has the capability and creativity to draw on our traditions, knowledge and experiences to develop programs that cross disciplinary boundaries and lead students to think in sophisticated, creative and analytical ways. ACS Athens is on its way to establishing a portfolio of brochures outlining its agreements with 25-30 US colleges and universities, which will serve as an invaluable source of information for ACS Athens Academy students as they plan for university study and navigate the application process.

Negotiations with university officials – admissions officers, members of registrars' and provosts' offices, deans and President's office staff – provide the opportunity for ACS Athens representatives to describe and explain the school's program in depth. This provides them with a rich context and deep understanding of ACS Athens' students' educational experiences when they are reviewing their applications for admissions. This understanding of what ACS Athens is about is the most important kind of knowledge that admissions officers can have. These agreements also provide ACS Athens students with added confidence in their knowledge and in their school's programs: an invaluable and empowering attitude that gives them confidence in their choices and their own abilities to succeed in the next phase of their academic careers.