

Inspiring Leadership



**Mark Rickard,
Physical Education
and Leadership
Teacher, ASB Advisor**

About four years ago, one of my players on the girls' basketball team was selected as a captain by her teammates. Directly after her selection, she approached me and asked, "As a captain, what am I supposed to do?"

I was actually a bit stunned. I assumed this girl naturally possessed the skills, knowledge and understanding that would allow her to be an effective captain. She was a multi-year starter, fantastic in the classroom and had a very high basketball IQ. How could she not know what was expected of a captain?

I immediately looked inward and asked myself exactly what sort of leadership education I provided my captains. The answer was... not as much as I should. After asking other coaches, and receiving similar assessments, it occurred to me that this was a crucial gap that needed to be filled.

That is why the Dragon Leadership Academy was created. I felt strongly that a program teaching crucial components of leadership could not only be of great benefit to the students and their teams, but it would

also fill a potential need by strengthening our kids' abilities to lead and inspire their peers in any environment in which they may find themselves in a position of leadership. At the same time, it would hopefully add to the teaching that is already happening on their respective teams. Further, I believed this program would provide another practical way for us to live out our mission of inspiring scholars, athletes and artists to serve and lead.

The overarching goal of the Academy is to deliver a robust, exciting, and inspiring leadership curriculum to student leaders in the Saint George's Upper School. The theoretical component of the curriculum was delivered over the course of six, 90-minute workshops. These workshops, presented online during October and November of 2020, were dedicated to three fundamental concepts:

- > **Finding Your Leadership Purpose**
- > **Broadening Your Leadership Perspective**
- > **Developing Tangible Leadership Skills**

“The Academy created safe spaces for students to share their expertise, their mistakes, and their questions about how to serve the SGS community,” says Dr. Francesca Mulazzi, Head of Upper School at SGS. “I envision the Dragon Leadership Academy evolving into an annual event that is both a rite of passage and a privilege to be invited to.”

Dr. Mulazzi was one of multiple keynote speakers who were excited to share their expertise and experiences with our students, including two recent alumni.

Natalie (Farias) Holloway ‘16 earned a hospitality management degree and graduated from the Center for the Advancement of Leadership at Utah Valley University, where she currently works organizing executive events. She spoke in one workshop on cultural intelligence and creating an inclusive team culture.

Natalie “Chessey” Thomas ‘10 played on the nationally ranked University of Tennessee women’s golf team before filling assistant coaching roles at the University of Idaho and the University of Washington. Chessey is now the associate head coach of women’s golf at the University of Nebraska. She addressed the Academy students on team chemistry, an attitude of gratitude, and crucial peer confrontations.

Along with these guest speakers from Utah and Nebraska, one workshop featured Dr. Tade’ Ayeni, Director of the Office of Diversity and Equity at the Hackensack Meridian School of Medicine in New Jersey. His multiple graduate degrees and wide experience in higher education has helped him understand how systems and programs can help or hinder students in their academic pursuits. He shared insights with our students on equity, inclusion, and leadership through storytelling.

“The students were very engaged, thoughtful, and insightful,” says Dr. Ayeni. “My background is in teaching at the college and graduate level and, although these students were still in high school, I was able

to conduct the session at the same level of a college course.”

So far, I truly believe the program has added value to the experience of those students who have participated. I have been very pleased with our student’s enthusiasm and engagement during the first phase of the Academy. Meaningful dialogue helped them learn about the skills, abilities, and passions of their classmates. They also gained insights through activities such as developing your personal calling card and creating a leadership purpose.

“I learned so much about myself and who I want to be as a leader through thorough investigation of my strengths, weaknesses, and especially my own purpose in life as a leader,” says senior Carol Wolff.

The next step for the Dragon Leadership Academy is turning theory into action, purpose into impact. The goal of phase two is for our students to use the tools and concepts presented in the workshops to develop their own leadership project with a focus on addressing a need or issue within their teams or clubs. During this next phase, I will act as their mentor as students develop and work toward implementing their particular projects.

This is where the magic happens! Academy students are currently developing projects within their own teams including increasing participation in our Chinese Club and developing new and creative ways to build team chemistry on the girls’ soccer team. I look forward to continuing to work with our students as new ideas are inspired!

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to make this program a reality. I look forward to making the Dragon Leadership Academy a sustainable and exciting opportunity in future years!

– Mark Rickard, SGS Physical Education & Leadership Teacher, ASB Advisor

“I don’t know if they realize how lucky they are to have this type of opportunity so early on in life.”

**Meghan Kilgore,
SGS K-12
Counselor**

“This leadership program allowed me to experience what it means to be a leader through the eyes of many outstanding people who look up to Coach R as a coach, role model, teacher, and most importantly an incredible leader.”

**Carol Wolff,
SGS Class of 2021**