



PIERREPONT SCHOOL
Westport, CT

Department Head:

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In the language program, we address, from the outset, the philosophical and linguistic elements of language learning. The essential focal point and goal of this program is for students to undertake a study of fluency in the language of a specific culture. We currently teach classical Latin and Mandarin Chinese; in the fall semester of 2006, we will introduce ancient Greek.

Language learning provides students with a growing understanding of the culture and, specifically, the people who think and speak in that language: in other words, insight into the "English-speaking mind," the "Chinese-speaking mind," or the "Latin-speaking mind." Language study is rigorous and exacting, extending beyond mere phraseology, verb conjugations, and simple communications.

At Pierrepont, students learn another language so that they may read the best that has been written in that language. Latin, Chinese and (beginning next year) ancient Greek have been chosen because of their respectively rich literacy traditions. Greek and Latin literature offers students an array of seminal works that form the foundation of much of the important literature of Western culture. Chinese has a literacy tradition that reaches back thousands of years, one that is abundant in works that bridge the gap between ancient and modern China.

The program begins with a year-long course in comparative grammar that is designed to prepare the students for the intensive language courses that follow. In the first semester, we embark on a rigorous survey of English grammar: individual parts of speech and their range of grammatical application, then phrases and clauses and their syntactical function(s) in an English sentence. Having covered that work, we then engage in a study of rudimentary Latin syntax, again covering words, phrases, and clauses with an eye towards examining the similarities and differences in English and Latin thought structure. A successful conclusion of this course allows the students to begin serious and intensive foreign language study without the overcast shadow of "experimentation." The books that form the curriculum of this course, used for more than a decade at St. Ann's School in Brooklyn, were written by the head of the humanities program at Pierrepont.

Latin begins with a two-year study of Latin grammar, syntax and vocabulary. The curricular material that serves as the underpinning for these courses also has been created by the head of the humanities program. During the second year of study, students are introduced to excerpted writings of ancient Roman authors, including Cicero, Catallus and Plautus, among others; an intensive reading and study of such works forms the core of the courses that follow.

Chinese was chosen, among other reasons, for the visual aspect of its calligraphy. It begins not only with a study of the spoken language, but with an emphasis on the characters that are critical to reading and writing. This emphasis on a balanced fluency continues in each successive year with the set objective of reading both contemporary and classical Chinese literature.

Additional faculty:

Daniel Lowinger
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