

Intersession: Dozens of New Ways to Learn

Inventive Mid-Year Enrichment Classes Differentiate Saints

By John White (Saints Parent, '11 & '13)

Overheard on the floor of Dougherty Gym during Intersession Expo:

"You know what, Tom? There are a jillion people here and it's too noisy. I don't think we can have the students present on each course the way we did last year."

"You're right, Jim. They're all having a good time looking at the exhibits. Let's just hang loose."

So while Mr. Cudal and Mr. Horne hung loose, the roughly 700 attendees at this year's Intersession Expo roamed and chatted and ate and pointed and asked and answered and explained and described what happened at St. Augustine High School during the month of January.

This is the second year that Saints has conducted Intersession courses, a four-week session of special curriculum between the semesters. Teachers have the chance to teach the way they want to teach. Students have the chance to learn the way they want to learn. Seniors have the chance to intern with business professionals. The Expo is a giant show-and-tell at the end of the session. Where did this all come from?

Becoming a Part of the School's Identity

"A lot of preparation over a number of years has gone into getting Intersession off the ground," Mr. Cudal begins. "This is not just a four-week change of instructional pace; it's a big piece of the school's identity. Several years ago, we started looking at ways in which we could differentiate Saints and make it uniquely attractive in the long run. Great athletics and early dismissal on Fridays are fine, but a school of our size constantly needs to come up with new answers to one question: 'Why should I go to Saints?'"

"In the early days, we tried some two-week, non-credit mini-courses in teachers' preferred topics. Mr. Wilson did a mini-course on model trains, and I did one on satire and humor. From there we used online survey tools to find out what would be important to both students and teachers in a program like this, and we learned from the experience of other Augustinian high schools that had run them. We developed the Intersession model of dedicating January to four-week courses for full credit."

Visible and Invisible Benefits

Intersession helps prepare students for college in two important ways: It forces them to buckle down and finish the first semester before the Christmas break, and it shows them how to take advantage of the variety they'll see in a college curriculum. They have the opportunity to select from three different types of courses:

- Graduation requirements – All freshmen take Speech, because many Saints courses call for presentation skills and the ability to talk before an audience. Students who want or need to devote extra time to Math spend Intersession in supplemental classes in ALEKS, a Web-based assessment and learning system.
- Physical Fitness – Saints teachers develop from scratch and conduct classes in cycling, golf, aquatic sports, rugby and other athletics, on and off campus. Students not only play the sports but also learn the history, theory and technique behind them.
- Enrichment – This is the mother lode of Intersession curriculum: digital photography, European travel, architecture, sports management, cooking and many other courses that bring out the unconventional in both teachers and students. Enrichment courses also include internships.

"First, you need to look at what's going on with the students during Intersession," Mr. Cudal explains. "Most of the Physical Fitness and Enrichment courses involve kinesthetic learning, usually with the hands. That's what happens in a sports class or Cooking or Automotive Maintenance. The students are learning in a completely different way from the rest of the year, and without even realizing it, they're using the art, math, science and vocabulary they've learned in

school. Even in the courses that require a written summary, they get to write about what they themselves accomplished, instead of having to write about character development in a Steinbeck novel. The fact that they can learn something new, be successful and show it off is a big value-add to their education.

"Then, there's the teachers' side of the equation. Intersession is the chance for them to build a curriculum around and share their diverse life experiences. If you're a science teacher, for example, you might have the opportunity to introduce yourself to your students as an expert in carpentry or social media or Italian cuisine or slapstick comedy. You have to put a lot of additional work into this unique learning experience, but you create a stronger bond with your students. That bond is a big part of why I try to nudge teachers out of their comfort zone in developing these courses, and I think it really pays off."

Mr. Horne mentioned the beneficial effects on learning in his State of Saints talk: "After Intersession 2008-09, the faculty noted an uptick in overall student performance after Intersession. We had gone into it with concerns that we might lose educational momentum between mid-December and February, but we think that the opportunity to learn differently for an entire month actually has a positive effect on students."

Internships: A Whole New World

Internships present seniors with a huge opportunity to work off campus under the guidance of professionals and the chance to begin thinking about their career. Saints parents and alumni have helped create many of the internships with their employers, and the school benefits from the visibility in the community.

"Internships are a really big deal in Intersession," continues Mr. Cudal. "They pay off for the students, the businesses, the parents and the school. We went from 30 seniors in internships last year to 60 this year, or more than one-third. We're shooting for 75 percent of the senior class in internships next year and 100 percent by 2013."

Mr. Hearn appreciates the increased visibility that internships bring to the school. "By their very nature, Saintsmen are our best advocates," he explains, "so when we have students interning in businesses like architectural firms, law offices and medical practices all over San Diego, the increased exposure in the community helps promote the good works of the school to a broader audience. To thank the companies that hosted interns, we held a reception just for them before the Expo."

Intersession Expo: "Look at what I did!"

Mr. Cudal handicaps the Intersession Expo: "That event is a great way to get parents and their sons onto the campus together, because the students get to say,



Intersession Racqueteers – During the Intersession 15 Saintsmen enrolled in the Racquetball class offered at Sorrento Valley Racquetball and Fitness Club. Students learned the basics of both games and had the opportunity to be mentored by National Champions and Hall of Famers in the sport. Pictured L-R are (front) Andrew Angulo ('11), Robbie Maasch ('11), Joe Cook ('11), Kurt Honold ('10-back); Alan Lam ('10), Carlos Soto ('11), Jack Suster ('10), and Mr. Horne. On a separate note three of the lads from this class participated in the National Paddleball Associations Western Regional Singles Shootout held at the Sorrento Valley club on Feb 6, 2010. Of 17 participants in the Junior division Saintsmen brought home 1st, 2nd, and 3rd places and won cash prizes. Winners at this tournament were 1st Conor Hofmann ('10); 2nd Kiernan Killion ('10) and 3rd Carlos Soto ('11). The NPA Nationals will be coming to San Diego at the end of March.

'Hey, Mom and Dad, look at what I did!' and their parents get to see it. A couple of students counted heads for me, and we were up from 400 attendees last year to almost 700 this year. In fact, I saw parents at the Expo this year that I haven't seen since their sons were freshmen, and I really had eager students saying, 'Mr. Cudal, can I do the presentation on Golf?' Intersession really went out with a bang this year."

And what about next year?

"We've already begun planning next year's Intersession," he answers. "Students need to let us know which courses interested them and which ones they want to take next year. The teachers put a lot of work into developing the curriculum for each course, and the sooner they know what will attract students, the more time they have to research and prepare."

Students: If you haven't yet signed up for courses of interest in Intersession 2010-11, contact the teachers and let them know.

Parents: If your business or organization has an internship program, or if you want help developing one, contact Mrs. Caine for more information.

Intersession 2009-2010, by the Numbers

Intersession courses taught by Saints teachers:	27
Students enrolled in Graduation Requirement courses (Speech and ALEKS):	242 (34%)
Students enrolled in Physical Fitness courses:	163 (23%)
Students enrolled in Enrichment courses (including internships):	310 (43%)
Companies hosting interns:	53 (including 18 medical)
Percentage of seniors in Intersession internships:	34
Percentage of seniors in Intersession internships by 2013 (goal):	100
Intersession Expo attendees, January 2009:	approx. 400
Intersession Expo attendees, January 2010:	approx. 700