



# ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL

## ADVANCED STUDIES PROGRAM

### Evaluations

#### 2016 Advanced Studies Program

The Advanced Studies Program at St. Paul's School, founded in 1957, is a residential summer school which permits boys and girls of superior academic ability from New Hampshire public and parochial high schools to take college preparatory courses of a quality and intensity otherwise unavailable to them. Most students rank within the top fifteen percent of their junior class, and are nominated to apply to the Program by their guidance counselor. Students are selected for attendance after their junior year on the basis of written applications, high school courses and grades, aptitude tests, recommendations of guidance counselors, teachers, activity supervisors, and interviewers.

Fifty-ninth Session: June 24-July 31, 2016

The 263 students at the 2016 session of the Advanced Studies Program were selected from 437 qualified applicants.

Each student was enrolled in one major course and a required Writing Workshop course. Each course was taught by a master teacher and one or two college-age interns. The major course met for roughly 20 hours per week (Monday through Saturday), and Writing Workshop met for roughly four hours per week. In most cases students took the major course which was their first choice at the time of application. All courses demand a high level of involvement for students; in five weeks, most courses cover a school year's worth of material. Course enrollment averaged 13 students. In addition to their academic commitments, all students participate in an afternoon recreation program four days a week. All students reside in St. Paul's School housing under the direction of resident interns and a house supervisor.

The enclosed evaluations comprise the student's transcript. These evaluations were submitted at the end of the Program by the student's teachers and residential supervisors. *Our evaluations are assessments of the student's performance and are not intended to be "recommendations".*

The majority of grades for the Advanced Studies Program are Satisfactory. A good number of our students, however, earn a grade of Superior. On occasion, a student may earn the even higher grade of Ranking Scholar, which designates a very exceptional student who has demonstrated the most outstanding performance. Please note that if a student earns a grade of either Superior or Ranking Scholar, it will be so noted on his/her evaluation. If nothing appears, it is understood to be a Satisfactory grade. The 2016 breakdown for grades was as follows:

#### Major Courses

Satisfactory 217 (83%)  
Superior 45 (16%)  
Ranking Scholar 1 (1%)

#### Writing Workshop

Satisfactory 226 (86%)  
Superior 37 (14%)

More information on the program and individual courses is also available at the program's website:  
**<http://asp.sps.edu>**.



# ST. PAUL'S SCHOOL

## 2016 Evaluations Advanced Studies Program

Emily Vail  
Nashua North High School

### **Forbidden Fictions**

#### **Teacher: Chris Canfield**

Students read between 60 and 100 pages six nights per week in this discussion-based course. Anchored by five modern, controversial novels, students also read complementary poetry or critical essays in addition to watching films that added to our discussion. Large excerpts from Azar Nafisi's "Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir In Books" rooted our introduction to major trends in literary criticism. In addition to discussion, students wrote several times per week practicing the course's chief skill: close reading. Class writing exercises ranged from passage-specific reflections to literary analyses that displayed students' close reading work. Applying critical lenses to readings, students zeroed in on elements that lay beneath the surface of the text. We also spent time considering the causes and conditions of censorship, mostly derived from our texts. To augment our analytical reading skills, we concentrated on "visual literacy" by "reading" the St. Paul's campus, a treasure trove of art and architecture amid a gorgeous landscape. The rigor and volume of work, coupled with the expectation that students draw and develop their own conclusions, make this course comparable to an advanced undergraduate literature seminar.

Emily's presence was integral to this course's success. Class discussion was at the heart of our work, and Emily was often at the heart of these discussions. She came to every class prepared in the obviously necessary ways -- careful, complete close reading, a willingness to both share her ideas and to listen to others' ideas, and ready from the start of class to ask carefully considered questions. These ranged from seemingly simple clarifying questions to bold hypothesizing ones that demonstrated careful, deliberate, considered thinking. In many of these situations, Emily's lead drove the discussion. These discussions were the backbone of the course, the avenue by which we investigated our readings, introduced and integrated the critical lenses through which we read, and struck upon new ideas. Emily's questions and comments always demonstrated careful, engaged reading that might be about fairly straight-forward points like plot or character or about more complex ideas like symbols, metaphors, or connotation. Again, Emily often led our discussions, but I can look back to many moments when she delighted in someone else's explanation. I particularly like this, her reconstruction of a big "aha" moment: "The biggest 'aha' moment I think I had during this course was during discussion about page 174 of Lolita. In this short and revealing passage, Humbert describes his plan to 'have [Dolores] produce eventually a nymphet with my blood in her exquisite veins, a Lolita the Second.' When reading, it didn't really click for me what H. H. was suggesting, but in discussion (I think it was Will who said something?) everything kind of fell into place for me, and I finally got how gross what he was saying was. It was at this point that I realized Lolita was truly an ideal for Humbert, and that Dolores the person mattered not to him. As long as he had a nymphet to pursue and violate, a Lolita, he

would be satisfied, even if it were his own daughter. Following our discussion of this passage, we had one of our first really big discussions about Lolita the ideal as a distinct entity from Dolores the person."

This reflection brings up two elements of class that were important supplements to our discussion, writing and debate. More on Emily's excellent writing next paragraph. I have always thought that the best thing a student can take away from this course is the ability to draw independent conclusions about a text, but the interdependence of this class in particular did so much to foster independent thinking. The makeup of our group created the conditions for a lot of respectful debate. The best debaters, and Emily was right up there, had to participate by focusing intently on each other's ideas, developing their rebuttals or agreements with attention to the accumulation of detail and evidence, and drawing their conclusions through synthesis of many ideas. This requires risking vulnerability, and Emily modeled it. These debates laid much of the foundation for the rest of the class -- a foundation built on spirited debate and give and take as we came to new understandings, and a sense of group (class) purpose in our analysis of texts. Emily was central to this endeavor. As the class interns observed, "she loves to stir the pot and takes just a little pleasure in being a contrarian (respectfully, of course), which makes class discussion lively and fun."

Excerpts from Emily's writing echo the articulateness with which she would express her points in class discussion and debate. We practiced using a variety of critical reading lenses, including psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, structuralist, post-structuralist, archetypal, and new-historic. In introducing these concepts, we stressed that they are a way into the text but none are the way in and that they are not mutually exclusive: "A skill I learned from *Forbidden Fictions* was to apply critical lenses. I had done this before in English classes, but didn't really know the terminology or the specific schools of thought associated with them. The structure of the powerpoint and the questions under each lens helped me to separate them in my mind; before it was all kind of a jumble and I wouldn't have been able to look through one lens versus another. I really enjoyed our analysis of 'Beloved' through these lenses and I found it eye opening as a way to look at literature differently." She gets more specific about using the lenses in this response: "In 'Lolita', traditional psychoanalysis is parodied, and so one shouldn't look through this lens with the hope of gleaning too much insight into Humbert's psyche or his dynamic with Dolores. Nabokov intentionally wrote to mess with the reader, and therefore the layered meaning one may perceive from the text when looking through the psychoanalytic lens isn't completely trustworthy." Of 'Beloved', she observed, "Repression and the psychosexual stages of development are both heavily, heavily laced throughout the novel, and their mechanics within the story are integral to plot and character development. For example, the complexity of Paul D.'s struggle with repressing his red heart and shoving every emotion he has into his tobacco tin ... conveys the density of memory associated with slavery and historical trauma." These substantive analyses reflect the nature and level of discussion that Emily brought to the table and the hard work she put into all of our endeavors.

While her final project idea was a good one, a "Forbidden Fictions Logic Grid Puzzle," she did not think through its execution well enough for us to understand the considerable thinking she'd put into creating it. That said, she began her presentation with a question that demonstrated the generous spirit she brought to class each day. She asked, "How am I going to follow that one?" of the presentation we'd just participated in. She had also given us so much to think about in the 28 days of class that preceded our final project day. It was a pleasure working with Emily. She brought so much energy, curiosity, and delight to our class. I'm so glad she was with us.

## Writing Workshop

### Teacher: Sara Erdmann

In Writing Workshop, students investigated what it means to be readers and writers engaged with the world around them. Through exploration around the themes of culture and difference, students learned to navigate the creative non-fiction of published writers who successfully used the written word to express their sense of identity; students then mined and reflected upon their own personal experience for a more comprehensive view of who they are. As members of a supportive intellectual community, students used freewriting, writing activities, and class discussion

as methods of expanding and developing their ideas, focusing on the ways that writing can serve to further the process of self discovery and self expression.

Writing assignments focused on several forms of the personal essay, a genre that offers opportunities for creative, rigorous and critical thought. Reading, discussions and writing exercises allowed students to further develop aspects of vibrant, meaningful composition: descriptive detail, clear and effective style, a strong narrative voice, and writing that takes place in a particular moment, thus captivating the reader's attention. Through many drafts, independent crafting, and workshop with peers, students worked to become stronger and more efficient writers with an increased awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

Engaged and enthusiastic, Emily was excited to get started from the moment she arrived in Writing Workshop this summer. While not particularly outgoing, she raised her hand often and was always prepared to share her thoughts when called upon. On workshop days, she worked well with her peers and was diplomatic and considerate with her feedback. Her relative shyness disappeared on the page, as she tackled challenging and personal topics that made her vulnerable to her reader. Indeed, some of her pieces read as meditations, such as an essay about playing the piano. She managed to bring emotion through the keys and make use of her facility with language even in the pieces that didn't have a clear plot or transformation. In another piece, she tackled the best and most difficult parts of her relationship with family, setting a scene and using detail and dialogue to bring the reader to a singular moment when things changed. She was never afraid to write about something complex or something she was still coming to fully understand, including parts of her own identity, but she often wrote her best pieces about tiny moments, like when she took a small rock from a store and carried it guiltily, knowing it wasn't hers to keep. These glimpses, while seeming relatively unimportant, actually told us the most about her, since she wrote about them in a way that resonated. We feel confident that Emily will continue to try new things and develop as a writer, since she clearly has a lot to say and is eager to play with the variety of ways she can use her voice.

### **Residential Supervisor**

Emily, on the quiet side in the beginning, took some time to settle into the dorm. As she settled and began to open up, she showed us all her enthusiastic and hilarious personality. She grew close to the other girls in her class and then to the other girls in the dorm. During our serenade she showed her enthusiasm and even took on a quick solo part. From then on, she only continued to open up and gain confidence. Emily brought her enthusiastic spirit to recreation, first enjoying yoga and then branching out and joining volleyball. In volleyball, she allowed herself to enjoy the game and not worry about skill level. She used her skills of time management and organization to get the most out of this experience. She constantly impressed us with how much she opened up and continued to challenge herself in social situations. Once she was comfortable, Emily was always ready with some comment to make us all laugh and provided a great positive energy when traveling together as a dorm. With her unending kindness and humor, Emily was a true joy to have in the dorm.