



WILLAMETTE  
ACADEMY

**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

Academic Year  
2017-18

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Emilio Solano '09 helps move furniture into Willamette Academy's new home.

This year has been a beautiful representation of the power of place. Over the past academic year, Willamette Academy found a new home on campus, and we continue to find new ways for our students to make connections and gain access to the resources Willamette University's campus has to offer.

In January 2018, the academy moved to the second floor of the Fine Arts West building, which overlooks the university's Quad and sits at the heart of the Willamette campus. Previously, academy students had to split their time and activities between the Willamette Academy Annex — a building on the far edge of campus on Cottage Street — and Smullin Hall. Our new space in Fine Arts West conveniently brings everyone together in a much larger and better-equipped space.

Academy logos, student photographs, student artwork and college pennants decorate the new space, which includes a computer lab with 20 computers and 16 additional workstations, a quiet study classroom that is also used for workshops and parent programming, a conference room and enough offices to provide workspace and private meeting space for full-time staff, Willamette student mentors and support staff.

This move physically ushers in a new era for the academy, and we are incredibly grateful for the university's support in our move and, in particular, that of Ruth Feingold, dean of the College of Liberal Arts. Now that we are all under one roof, we will be able to accomplish much more for our students.

Since the move, students have reported feeling more connected to campus. On any given day our students could walk by a rugby practice on The Quad, pass through an event on Jackson Plaza, or witness one of the Sigma Chi slip-and-slides when the weather is nice. These experiences provide a new perspective

for our students in understanding the culture of college.

You can now find our students grabbing coffee or a bite to eat at the Bistro — and even finding time to study there. Through the windows of Fine Arts East you may hear an academy student playing the violin in one of the practice rooms. This past year marked the first time that our 11th- and 12th-graders had borrowing access at Willamette's library. Now, it's not uncommon to see a group of them studying together on the library's second floor.

Some of these new connections between students and campus result from specific actions by the academy and the university. However, much of it is also organic. This speaks to the power of place. Being at the heart of campus, our students feel a stronger sense of belonging — and they show it by the way they engage with campus resources and spaces.

As we aim to demystify the college experience, I have no doubt that our new place will have an everyday impact on our incredible students.

Emilio Solano '09  
Executive Director

## SUMMER CAMPS AT WILLAMETTE UNIVERSITY PREPARE ACADEMY STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE

Over nine days in summer, 58 Willamette Academy students saw what their future could hold.

The 10th- and 11th-graders participated in a residential camp on the Willamette University campus, where they took classes taught by Willamette professors and stayed in residence halls.

“The camps are an important part of the academy’s purpose — to demystify the college experience,” says Emilio Solano ’09, the academy’s executive director. “It’s critical for our students to see what professors are like and get a window into what they teach and how they teach it.”

Although Willamette professors have volunteered previously for the summer camps, this year marked the first time faculty members, rather than local high school teachers and community members, taught all three core courses in science, math, and reading and writing.

Biology professor Dave Craig and his students waded in the Mill Stream or explored the campus grounds with binoculars in search of birds and other animal species. Math professor Josh Laison taught students about graph theory, the subject of his research, which uses mathematical structures to explore relationships between objects. History professor Cecily McCaffrey took students on a deep dive into the hidden meanings in 7th-century Chinese poetry.



Eighth- and ninth-graders, who attended a non-residential camp, took classes in statistics and scientific concepts, as well as “Identity, Community and Belonging” taught by Professor Catalina de Onís.

Kevin Garcia Vargas, a junior at West Salem High School, appreciated the chance to bond with peers, overcome his shyness and experience residential life on a college campus. “All of the courses were amazing,” he says. “I took a lot of knowledge from them that I will apply when I go back to school.”

Andrea Garcia Torres, a junior at South Salem High School, found it challenging to be away from her close family for a week. She was also initially intimidated by the prospect of being taught by university professors.

“After getting to know the professors, we felt welcome and comfortable around them. They brought both fun and learning to the classroom, and it was truly an amazing experience,” she says. “The camp helped prepare me for the future at a university.”

In one of the summer camp classes, academy students discuss the literary and historic themes in 7th-century Chinese poetry.

Academy students  
receiving free or  
reduced-cost  
school lunches

90%

“Willamette Academy taught me that I am responsible for my future, regardless of my background. That’s what keeps me going.”

— Amanda Zuniga  
Class of 2012



Approximate annual cost, per student, to  
conduct academy programming

\$2,340

Academy  
students of color

98%

Willamette Academy serves 8-12th grade youth from communities that are historically underrepresented in higher education. It provides students with academic support, mentoring and access to technology, as well as programs such as summer camps, leadership skills development and college entrance exam preparation. Students are accepted into the academy based on their potential and desire to further themselves and their families through higher education. In addition, they must meet at least one of four qualifying factors: being low-income, a student of color, a recent immigrant or a first-generation college student.

“As a first-generation college student, I found it really powerful to be able to interact with current college students and share college-related experiences with peers. It made the dream a reality.”

— Rachel Meza Rojas  
Class of 2014

152

Salem-Keizer  
School District  
students (8-12th  
grade) currently  
enrolled at the  
academy

“Willamette Academy taught me that first-generation college students can make it a normal thing to attend college; that we are capable of accomplishing our dreams and breaking cycles; and that if we have the will and drive to attend college, it can happen.”

— Leone Davila  
Class of 2015

Academy students  
who will be first-  
generation college  
students

96%

3.6

Average GPA of  
Academy students  
(cumulative as of 2017-  
18 academic year)



Students who've completed the  
academy program since 2002

267

Number of academy  
alumni selected as  
Gates Millennium  
Scholars

7



Academy alumni who've either  
graduated from or are currently enrolled at a  
two- or four-year college

68%

"Both of my parents are  
immigrants with little  
education, and their dream  
has always been for their  
children to get an education.  
Willamette Academy made  
that dream possible by  
giving guidance and  
answering questions —  
not only for me but also for  
my parents."

— Yaritza Torres  
Class of 2011

Number of academy  
alumni selected as Ford  
Scholars by the Ford  
Family Foundation

6

"The academy is a place where  
people with the same passion  
for higher education can bond,  
support each other and work  
together towards the common  
goal of attending college."

— Thalia Vargas  
Class of 2012

## 2017-18 HIGHLIGHTS



Moving Day



Trail Blazer game



Emily Drew



Summer Program

In academic year 2017-18, academy **students participated in 74 workshops**, campus visits, lectures, and events.

Ten Saturday sessions **engaged students** in community-building exercises, goal-setting, college exploration, high school and college transition, and SAT prep, as well as providing general academic support.

The academy began using RoadTrip Nation, a nationally recognized curriculum that focuses on career exploration, and all academy **10th-graders piloted a new curriculum** through the program.

All **students had the opportunity to visit** Reed College, the University of Portland, Western Oregon University and Oregon State University.

College Track sessions provided **academy seniors workshop sessions** on financial aid, college and scholarship applications, and matriculating and transitioning into college.

In September, **students attended the Paint and Struggle event** on campus sponsored by La

Chispa — a Willamette student- and faculty-led collaboration that seeks to increase environmental justice conversations and activities at Willamette University and in the surrounding Willamette Valley. **Students viewed and discussed** documentaries and made mural paintings with Chilean muralist Camilo Díaz and documentary filmmaker Kelly Baur.

In October and April, the academy took **seniors and juniors, respectively, on a college tour** to Seattle University and the University of Washington. This will now be an annual trip for academy juniors.

In November, **students attended the Atkinson Lecture** titled “What Russia Can Teach Us About the United States” delivered by journalist, activist and author Masha Gessen.

In January, **students designed and implemented** an event titled “The Voice of Justice” at the Ike Box for Willamette’s Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration Week.

The academy moved to the second floor of Fine Arts West on the Willamette campus.

In February, 13 students attended a Portland Trail Blazers game thanks to a donation of tickets by a Willamette trustee and the Blazer’s Edge online fan community.

In the spring 2018 semester, for the first time in academy history, **26 academy seniors took a credit-bearing college-level writing course**, “Writing for Academic Audiences,” taught by a Willamette University professor.

In March, **students attended** the Dean Santos Diversity Speaker Series at the Law School that featured the five women justices from the Oregon Supreme Court.

In April, **students attended a poetry workshop** with Willamette alumnus and poet Alejandro Jimenez.

In May, the **academy celebrated the largest class in its history** — 27 graduates. Of those 2018 graduates, 13 will attend Willamette in the fall. The rest will attend one of these institutions: Stanford University, Pomona College, Oregon State University,

University of Oregon, Western Oregon University, Warner Pacific University, Chemeketa Community College or Portland State University.

In June, the academy welcomed **32 rising 8th-graders**.

During a 12-day residential summer camp **seniors took a writing course** focused on their college and scholarship applications, “Critical (Re)Thinking About Education” with Willamette University professor Emily Drew, and college transition classes — all while acting as camp leaders for 8th- and 9th-graders.

Academy 8th- and 9th-grade **students participated in a six-day day non-residential camp** and took classes in statistics and science, as well as an “Identity, Community, and Belonging” class with Willamette University professor Catalina de Onís and several of her students.

Academy 10th- and 11th-grade **students participated in a nine-day residential summer program** and took core classes taught by Willamette professors.

## FROM WILLAMETTE ACADEMY TO STANFORD UNIVERSITY

This fall, Willamette Academy graduate Crystal Llanos entered Stanford to study biomedical engineering. Here, she explains how the academy — and one generous donor in particular — helped her achieve her dream of higher education.

### **Q: How did Willamette Academy prepare you for college?**

The academy helped me with my confidence and motivation. It helped me be myself and embrace who I am, knowing I wouldn't be judged. I learned to love to speak in front of people, to express my opinions freely and appropriately, and to listen and learn from others. Plus, it provided a reminder to keep pushing through. In my most unmotivated moments, the academy reminded me what I had been working towards for more than four years.

### **Q: Would you have gone to college without the academy?**

I probably would have attended a local community college, but I doubt I would have finished.

### **Q: How did you decide upon Stanford?**

I was admitted to both Stanford and USC, and I wanted to visit both schools to help me choose between such exceptional institutions. Stanford offered me a travel grant, but USC didn't. I didn't have the money to pay for the trip to USC. Fortunately — thanks to a fund set up by donor Steve Ickes in honor of his wife, Mary — the academy was able to pay for me to travel from Stanford to USC and then back to Portland.

I'm extremely thankful, as otherwise I would have had a very tough time choosing the right school or being confident in my decision. One day, I hope to be like my generous donor — to be able to give back and to help people who never thought they'd receive assistance.



Crystal Llanos stand in front of Stanford's Hoover Tower during Admit Weekend.

### **Q: Did Willamette Academy help you prepare for the trip in any other way?**

Absolutely. Executive Director Emilio Solano helped me plan out the entire trip and even offered to travel with me. I'd never traveled on my own before, nor planned a trip like that — booking flights, figuring out hotels, understanding traffic and being aware of unsafe areas in the city. While I probably could have managed on my own, the trip would most likely not have gone as smoothly or been as productive without Emilio's help.

### **Q: Do you have a post-graduation career in mind yet?**

I hope to eventually found a non-profit organization to provide affordable healthcare technology to underrepresented minorities. I don't have all the details yet, but I know I want to help people, especially through healthcare.



Our mission is to educate, inspire and empower students from historically underrepresented communities who have the desire to advance to and achieve higher education.

Learn more, including how you can support our work:  
[willamette.edu/community/academy](http://willamette.edu/community/academy)



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