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## NEWS

# Be Fruitful And Multiply – How Intersession Fostered Curiosity

JUNE 6, 2024 BY LISA CRUZ

"Be Fruitful and Multiply"—that is how A.J. Jacobs, a Dalton alum ('86), parent and the opening speaker for the Intersession 2024 assembly, explained one of the tenets of his book, *A Year of Living Biblically*. As the Bible says, one should "be fruitful and multiply". While the Bible refers to the creation of life, Jacobs applied the sentiment metaphorically with regard to Intersession. He claimed that students' thoughts and curiosity should multiply over the course of Intersession as they explore a new topic unfamiliar to them. In a way similar to his curiosity as he lived biblically, he encouraged students to allow their creativity and imagination to flourish during Intersession.

Intersession is a one-week program that occurs annually at the end of April to the beginning of May. Its current manifestation was first initiated last year and is already set to continue in the years to come. During Intersession, all traditional Dalton classes are suspended, and students enroll in one intensive course for the duration of the week. Students show up to their singular class from approximately 9 A.M. to 2:30 P.M. every day and explore what is usually left unexplored. There were around 20 classes that students could choose from and, while students register for their top choices, they are inevitably assigned to one.

While Intersession is mandatory for 9th through 11th graders, 12th graders are given the choice on whether to attend, as classes for seniors have already ended. As such, the seniors are given first choice in all of their classes, and the remaining spots are then made available to other grades. In the case of Pizza City, a popular offering, the option to sign up was removed from the registration form for 9th-11th graders as it had been entirely filled by seniors during their early registration.

Teachers collaborate in pairs or trios to design classes both they and their students might be interested in. Intersession takes a considerable portion of the year to plan. The Intersession Committee, composed of faculty members Abby Cacho, Will Hummel, Sean Mattio, Melissa Soleimani, and Charlie Forster Stewert, spends months reviewing feedback and altering the program from year to year. Hummel explained: "Intersession II was a really great progression from last year, and we believe it represents some of what is best about progressive education." As Hummel references, Intersession is a piece of Dalton that fulfills Helen Parkhurst's vision for Dalton. In the Dalton Plan, she discussed how she wanted a very open-ended curriculum with a lot of choice in what students choose to pursue. While Dalton does offer many choices in its typical course registrations, students cannot just choose ANY class as there are some guidelines and requirements for graduation. Intersession suspends those mandatory classes and offers the ultimate open curriculum where students are free to choose their own paths.

Hummel further credits the faculty with the success of the program: "Dalton's faculty and staff deserve all the credit for dreaming up and running these classes: Intersession shows us what is possible when we remove constraints and have the time and space to explore and learn. The enthusiastic response from students was also encouraging, and we hope that everyone took something enduring away from this week."

Hummel references this idea of curiosity: that Intersession is a time to explore and learn something new. Some students learned about gaming techniques, wilderness survival, and managing a restaurant, while others enjoyed the week by eating pizza or reading for pleasure. *The Daltonian* interviewed some of the faculty advisors to learn more about their experiences of planning the session and interacting with students.

For some faculty members, this year marked their first time taking part in an Intersession. High School Librarian Roxanne Feldman, who led the Video Games class, had only positive things to say about her first experience hosting Intersession. Feldman especially enjoyed the general excitement students had and the teambuilding aspect of the Intersession: "I loved it when the students interacted with each other as we ran an impromptu mini video game tournament and some of them acted as coaches for their 'teams' of novices – there was a lot of enthusiasm and hype."

On the other hand, teachers like High School English Teacher and Creative Writing Program Coordinator Christopher Hood already had last year's Intersession under their belt. Hood led the Reading for Pleasure course last year and loved it so much that he brought it back again for the 2024 season. He enjoyed hosting Reading for Pleasure because it "reconnects students with one of the most wonderful joys — losing yourself in a good book." In addition to reading, the group traveled to numerous locations throughout the week, including Cold Spring, Governors Island, and the Met. In the words of Hood himself, "how could you go wrong!"

Although this year's Intersession just wrapped, the organizers and faculty alike can't wait for the future iterations. On behalf of the Intersession Committee, Hummel added that: "for Intersession III, we will continue to evolve and experiment, and in particular to prioritize deep dives into new topics, experiential learning, building and doing, service learning, and using New York City as an extended classroom." Echoing the message of taking lessons from this year's Intersession, Feldman stated, "in future years, I would definitely still take kids out to the gaming cafe and arcades, and invite industry insiders for presentations," in addition to "mak[ing] sure that all tech aspects work well for a smooth week!" Ultimately, the planning committee hopes that "Intersession become[s] one of Dalton's signature programs, and continue[s] to grow in ways that align with our school's mission: to 'develop intellectual

independence, creativity and curiosity and a sense of responsibility toward others.'" After the great success of the first two years, it shouldn't be long before they achieve their goal.

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