



## SYNOPSIS

In an effort to broaden and uniquely tailor academic offerings to individual students, Providence Academy's Upper School will implement Quo Vadis - Pathways toward Graduation. Beginning with the 2017-2018 academic year, Upper School students will have the opportunity to select regular and honors pathways in certain disciplines. This will give students, and their families, the flexibility to tailor PA's premier college-prep experience better toward their own college and life aspirations.

## ABOUT QUO VADIS - PATHWAYS TOWARD GRADUATION

"Quo Vadis" is Latin for "Where are you going?" It comes from a tradition about an encounter of St. Peter with the risen Christ. "Quo Vadis" has taken on a meaning for Christians about discerning paths in life.

Starting in fall of the 2017-2018 Academic Year, the Upper School will use this program title to refer to each student's individualized plan for academic coursework in the Upper School. Beginning then, PA will offer new course opportunities that will increasingly allow students to explore and customize a program to suit their own individual talents, abilities and interests.

Quo Vadis will offer new flexibility. For example, next year PA will offer honors options in many courses in Fine and Performing Arts as well as in all core courses in English for grades 9-12. The following year, honors options will become available for all core courses in Religion and History for grades 9-12. When the plan is complete, students will be able to pursue chosen pathways—regular or honors—in all academic disciplines and the arts.

Noteworthy for English and then Religion and History is that *all students at both levels will attend these courses* together. (This is an approach that we began a few years ago through offering college credit to students in Religion and Spanish who chose to pursue it). A primary reason for this is that PA alumni, teachers, and administrators have consistently supported the value of our shared engagement with ideas in core courses. It is rare, and it works to students' advantage.

In addition to these developments, Quo Vadis will feature additional online elective options including, next year, computer science and programming courses.

These developments will all be added to a program that will retain current advanced options in the sciences, as well as AP exam preparation possibilities. Any student may enter or exit a given path at designated points along the way. Some students have particular gifts in humanities, others in arts, others in the sciences or languages. Some have gifts in many of these areas. The Quo

Vadis program is designed to help students explore our academic program to their best advantage.

Quo Vadis' approach to new honors courses regarding eligibility, pre-registration application, enrollment, and continuation or otherwise, will be very similar to that currently used for math, science, and world languages (performing arts will require an audition as part of its process).

Quo Vadis' expansion of honors to include all sciences, humanities, fine arts, and performing arts will allow PA to articulate a complete "Honors Program" to replace its current plate of honors courses and graduation with honors. A student will be automatically admitted into the Honors Program once enough courses and other criteria are in place to warrant an on-track-for-cum-laude status. The Honors Program will include within its umbrella graduation: cum laude, magna cum laude, summa cum laude, and various honors "paths" (for example, recognition for completion of a particular subject area).

Academic lettering will remain unchanged. Lettering criteria are based solely on overall cumulative GPA from one semester to the next. Honors paths and graduation with honors factor such criteria as the number of credits, number of honors courses, and cumulative GPA in regular and honors/advanced/ACC courses.

Planning will become more important than ever. We will encourage students and parents to map out their ideas well in advance. PA will expand its use of its premier college-planning tool, Naviance, to include "course planning." This utility in Naviance has amazing power to serve our community. Not only will it allow students to investigate many pathways toward graduation, it will improve academic advising and individual college planning at PA.

We are excited by the new flexibility and tailoring that Quo Vadis will bring to each PA Upper School student, while preserving the core of the rich and shared academic experience that helps make PA *A School Like No Other*.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **1. What is PA trying to achieve with Quo Vadis?**

Students want and/or need more opportunities to tailor PA's premier college-prep better toward their own collegeandlife aspirations. It is true that, with only one offering in many classes, the level of challenge currently can feel ramped up to some students and ramped down for others. This will change, as it has in other courses where we have introduced regular and honors pathways.

### **2. Why is PA adding a new honors pathway? Academics are difficult enough; why is additional academic rigor necessary?**

Honors pathways are not new at PA. They are being expanded because of the benefits they bring. Students will likely find regular pathways less demanding than some current offerings, as happened when PA introduced honors pathways in sciences and math. They may also find honors offerings to provide additional opportunities to excel, with commensurate recognition on transcripts.

**3. Is PA really just adding an easier pathway because it realizes the current curriculum is too difficult?**

No. PA stands by its curriculum, which has brought success and exceptional preparation and right-fit college admissions to graduates at all GPA levels. With Quo Vadis, students will find enhanced ability to tailor levels of difficulty that more fully match their abilities and interests.

**4. How will my children, who already excel academically at PA, benefit from Quo Vadis? They already expect to get into a top college; why make it more difficult for them?**

Students who are selective-college candidates will be able to tailor honors pathways to their special abilities and/or feature more honors classes on their transcripts than is currently possible at PA.

**5. How will my child, an “ordinary” student academically at PA, benefit from Quo Vadis? The last thing s/he needs is more rigor.**

Quo Vadis will enable “ordinary” students to pursue a genuine PA education more fully adapted to their abilities.

**6. How will Quo Vadis affect academic transcripts?**

Honors and advanced course designations will appear on students’ transcripts, accompanied by supporting materials designed to help college readers understand the level of course challenge.

**7. How will colleges perceive Quo Vadis?**

We received college admissions input and feedback as this idea developed. With 12 years of PA graduating classes, many colleges—public and private, local and national—have become familiar with our curricular offerings and have, in numerous cases, made special positive evaluations of PA applicants. We will continue to produce our School Profile, a resource tailored for the college admission audience to help them interpret each student’s academic pathway. Additionally, letters from college counseling will unpack each student’s academic decisions and trajectory.

**8. My child’s target college gives scholarships to every applicant with a 3.0 high school GPA. How will Quo Vadis help my student achieve this goal?**

PA opposes such blanket approaches to college scholarships because they do not differentiate among quality and challenge of high schools; i.e. they attempt to make apples-to-apples comparisons where it really is apples to oranges. Yet, while many factors go into any student’s GPA level at PA, Quo Vadis emphasis on choice and aptitude may help students achieve more at various ability levels. PA remains committed to helping each student find best-fit colleges.

**9. How will Quo Vadis affect Latin and other academic honors opportunities at PA?**

It is meant to expand, not replace, our current offerings.

**10. Why does PA continue to make academic course changes in the Upper School?**

Reorganizing course structure is a natural result of reviewing our academic program and is a feature of a constant-improvement commitment in top independent schools.

**11. Every year it feels like there is another change...what's next?**

While there are no current plans beyond Quo Vadis, PA will always maintain a constant-improvement mindset.

**12. How will regular students and honors students co-exist in the same class?**

They already do co-exist in junior and senior religion classes and Spanish IV, with our joint college credit option. Ad-hoc surveys of our graduates indicate that they cherished combined-class opportunities at PA, and don't want that to change.

**13. Can PA ensure that faculty members will be able to differentiate between students on different pathways who are in the same class?**

Yes. PA will be committed to offering necessary faculty development.

**14. How will grading, assessing, etc. occur between students on different pathways who are in the same class?**

Particular assessments will have differentiated expectations of preparedness. The teachers will clearly differentiate for each pathway, and communicate what is expected.

**15. How will students react socially and behaviorally being in the same class with students who are on a different pathway?**

We are already accustomed to this in some classes, and alumni praise this approach.

**16. Why will Quo Vadis initially just apply in Fine Arts and English?**

"Piloting" the new approach will enable us to apply what we learn next year to the fuller implementation.

**17. How will PA determine if Quo Vadis is successful?**

Student and parent response, student performance, teacher and college input will all be instructive. We anticipate that we will learn and make continual improvements through experience.

**18. If you find that Quo Vadis isn't working during the implementation year, will you scrap the program?**

We are committed to expansion and, having differentiated regular and honors programs in some disciplines already; we plan to build on that success.

**19. Is Quo Vadis necessary since PA already has college credit and AP exam availability?**

Yes. We want to assure more opportunities for all students at varying degrees of aptitude and interest—beyond our current offerings in language, science, and math.

**20. Does my child have to take honors in every subject or can s/he pick and choose?**

No. The improved flexibility will be in picking and choosing according to strengths and preferences.

**21. Do other schools employ similar curriculum approaches? If so, who? Do you have case studies?**

PA's specific approach to offering the new honors pathways will, as in many things, be distinctive. Yet this development included peer school and college research, along with feedback from college admissions professionals.

**22. What are the minimum requirements to get into an honors pathway?**

Typically, a grade of A in the prior non-honors course, and an audition in the Fine Arts.

**23. Why not just implement an AP curriculum instead of Quo Vadis?**

Much of the AP content is found in PA's upper-level courses but does not determine PA's scope or schedule. Further, PA's approach preserves the value of teacher-student education and not teaching to a test.

**24. Once you are in a pathway, can you adjust midway through the year (either direction)?**

No. Our experience is that full-year commitments work best, and this is the approach we already follow with honors and regular sections in math, science, and world languages.

**25. How are students advised on course planning and how, as parents, will we make sense of our student's path?**

The Academic Support Team, especially school and college counselors, will continue to work closely with students in their course planning. Our Upper School Counselor meets with each rising freshman and current freshman in the spring, students attend registration presentations/workshops, and students pursuing honors/advanced courses receive a series of communications and information that is also sent to parents. In addition, a notable aspect of Quo Vadis will be the inclusion of additional academic planning resources within our Naviance platform (college planning software tool) which includes both a

student and parent portal. Parents are also consulted during parent/teacher conferences about student course planning for the following year.

**If you have questions or would like more information, please contact Michael Tiffany at [michael.tiffany@providenceacademy.org](mailto:michael.tiffany@providenceacademy.org) or 763-258-2583.**