

Old Scona Academic

Report

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1. Preface

Having stood in the heart of what is now the city of Edmonton for over a century, the educational institution that is today known as Old Scona Academic (OSA) High School holds a legacy of academic achievement and a focus as a university preparatory school. Institutions such as the Fraser Institute and the national magazine *Maclean's* have attested to Old Scona Academic's excellence, rating it academically best in Alberta and Canada, respectively. The only public school in the top five high schools listed by the Fraser Institute, Old Scona Academic provides an unparalleled opportunity for anyone who can obtain admission to reach their full potential.

2. Historic Institution

The building that Old Scona Academic currently stands in has been recognized as a Provincial Historical Resource since 2008 by the Government of Alberta. The building's origins date back to 1907, when Premier Alexander Rutherford laid the first cornerstone of what was to become Strathcona Collegiate Institute - one of present-day Edmonton's first high schools. It was designed in the Edwardian Classical Free Style, a departure from stuffy Victorian buildings of the recent past. One of Edmonton's most sophisticated buildings at the time; it was intended to "accommodate the teaching of the liberal arts and the sciences." From 1909-1911, the top floor (now the auditorium) acted as the first teaching site for the University of Alberta, now the largest post-secondary institution in Edmonton and in the province. The University's first class of graduates held its convocation at Old Scona, where Lord Strathcona was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. During this period, many local organizations held their meetings in the auditorium, making the building a bastion of community life as well.

By 1912, Strathcona Collegiate Institute had been renamed Strathcona High School. By this time, the university had departed to its present-day campus, and this made room in the building for a kindergarten in the basement, as well as a rifle range for Company 199 during World War I. In the 1960s it served as a junior high, and in 1971 it became a site for continuing education and special education, as well as a campus for MacEwan University during its early years. Due to its proximity to the University of Alberta, it attracted students bound for post-secondary and in 1976 Old Scona became the alternative academic school it is today. Old Scona became an IB world school in 1980, and in 2008 it celebrated its centennial anniversary.

3. Academic Success

Old Scona Academic High School was established in 1976 as an alternative academic high school, and it has excelled in this role ever since. As an institution targeted towards a high-achieving and academically-minded demographic, it offers an unparalleled opportunity for some of the brightest students in Edmonton to obtain a rigorous and fast-paced education that truly allows them to fulfill their potential and not only succeed, but flourish. The academic nature of Old Scona Academic is not only a drive to obtain for superficial marks, but characterized by “such a desire to learn, to grow, to debate with each other” (Kristiann McCool, alumna) - it fosters and stokes the love of learning in all its students.

3.1 Success in Alberta Education:

Each year, the Government of Alberta issues a standardized test for 30-level core courses, designed to provide a standard metric by which each student’s mastery of the course can be judged, independent of grading discrepancies between schools and teachers.

Old Scona Academic has consistently boasted results exceeding that of the provincial average - in the 2016 year, OSA’s average across all 30-level subjects exceeded that of the province by 13.8%. In the same year, the school’s average percentage of students who achieved standard of excellence in each subject surpassed that of the province by 49.2 percentage points.

While this success is in part due to the nature of the student population of OSA - as the students tend to value learning and work hard - the school provides a unique environment that fosters excellence to an even greater extent and that offers more opportunities for in depth study and knowledge.

3.2 Success in the International Baccalaureate Program:

The International Baccalaureate program is an international program designed to encourage well-roundedness and active global citizenship in students through education. As noted, this program offered at Old Scona Academic since 1980, allows students to pursue in-depth study - delving deeper into subject matter than does the Alberta curriculum - and critical analysis of their courses. Furthermore, it develops essential life skills beyond academics and takes a holistic view of the importance of creativity, activity, and volunteerism.

As of 2016, every student at Old Scona takes at least one IB course, and at the end of the two year program each student writes a multi-part exam for each IB subject they have been enrolled in. Across all subjects, OSA’s average score exceeds that of the world-wide average grade by 14.3%. Each year, approximately 10-20% of the graduating class completes the full IB diploma. This includes the completion of all core subjects, a second language, and a course examining the nature of knowledge in IB, as well as their accompanying course-specific self-

directed essays (or experiments in the cases of the sciences) and a 3000 - 4000 word essay on a topic of their choosing.

Schools worldwide offer the International Baccalaureate program, and they go through a rigorous certification program to do so. At Old Scona Academic, the IB curriculum allows for intense, challenging, and rewarding study of subject matters that extend into the post-secondary world.

3.3 Postsecondary Excellence

As, essentially, a university preparatory school, Old Scona Academic provides its students with the tools for success in postsecondary education. Virtually 100% of Old Scona graduates qualify for post-secondary each year. Graduates have described the transition into university as seamless, owing to the busy schedules and rich school life at Old Scona. Between rigorous academics, the variety of fine arts offered at the school, a well-developed sports program, near-ubiquitous volunteering, a variety of clubs, and part-time jobs, students are encouraged to develop necessary time management skills in a safe learning environment where the consequences of mistakes or trial and error are not nearly as far reaching as they would be in university.

Course material is often also taught to an extent where the knowledge ‘jump’ between high school and university is minimized. While IB courses can even allow students to obtain course credits and bypass first-year university courses, the accelerated pace at which classes move allow more topics to be covered. As interviewed OSA alumni have stated, this and the style of teaching in classrooms, acclimatize students to the rigour of university.

A wide variety of scholarships are available to graduating students, and almost 100% obtain the full Alexander Rutherford Scholarship. Universities actively recruit from Old Scona, and every three years Ivy League representatives present to OSA and other Edmonton area students in the auditorium at OSA.

Old Scona Academic has produced numerous notable graduates, from its time as the Strathcona Collegiate Institute to now. Lois Hole, who served as the 15th Governor General of Alberta, graduated from Strathcona Composite High school in 1948. Another graduate, Ray Muzyka, obtained his MD before going on to co-found BioWare, which has been acquired by EA and developed such hits as *Mass Effect* and *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*. In recent years, Lillian Zuo (class of 2012) and Richard Wang (class of 2016) both went on to attend Harvard University, and Ryan Yeh (class of 2009) is currently studying law at Yale University.



Class of 2016-17 Graduation

Credit: Ben Yang, OSA Photography 2016-17

3.4 Academic Extracurricular Activities

Old Scona Academic's students have a diversity of academic and other talents which they often apply outside of school. The most well-known extracurricular at Old Scona is likely Speech and Debate. OSA boasts an extremely strong program for the topic, and students take part and do well in competitions across the city, province and country. On related note, there is also wide participation in activities such as the high school as model U.N. hosted at the University of Alberta (with OSA students typically winning at least one award per U.N. committee) and Reach for the Top, a competitive trivia game in which Old Scona has been competing at a national level for nine consecutive years. OSA Alumnus and now federal MP Garnett Genuis reported that speech and debate was integral to his career, as the youngest elected member of the Conservative Party of Canada. Another area in which the school excels is in math competitions. At Old Scona Academic, a dedicated club teaches contest math outside of school time and students participate in contests offered by highly acclaimed institutions, such as the University of Waterloo and the Mathematical Association of America. OSA often receives students who have attended the International Math Contest, held worldwide in a different country each year - recently, Thailand and India have hosted this contest.

4. Extracurricular Excellence

Though Old Scona has a reputation for being focused solely on academics, it also has amazingly well-developed extra-curricular activities, especially for a school of its size. The hurdles that students overcome, be they constraints in time or availability, to develop as well-rounded people are exemplary of the resilient, creative, and determined characteristics nurtured by the school and its teachers. “In terms of the things I wanted to do, I was still able to do them; I just made my own time to do them.” (Monika Viktorova, research coordinator at the University of Alberta) - the academic rigour of the school provides a creative outlet in being a challenge to overcome in and of itself.

4.1 In the Sports

As a small, historic school, Old Scona Academic does not have a gym - this notable absence and setback elicits innovative solutions from teachers and students alike. Physical education classes are conducted in surrounding facilities, such as the Kinsmen pool and Garneau tennis courts. Sports teams practice in a similar vein, travelling to surrounding schools and utilizing their gyms.

Even though Old Scona does lack a gym, Old Scona Academic has been shown to hold its own athletically. Even in such a small school, Old Scona has two Division One teams at the top of their game: the handball team and the badminton team. In the 2016-2017 school year, the men’s handball team won gold at the Blessed Sacrament Tournament, third at the Harry Ainlay Tournament, and Consolation Champion at Provincials due to a three way tie, and the badminton team achieved third in cities and silver medals in multiple categories in provincials, in spite of the small community and lack of a gym. In addition, in the 2016-17 school year, Old Scona Academic boasted three Metro All-Star athletes, an impressive number for a school of 360.



Old Scona Athletes

Credit: Old Scona Photograph 2016/17

4.2 In the Arts

Old Scona Academic boasts strong programs in the arts. Its concert band, jazz band, and choir programs stage shows each semester, as do drama and musical theatre. Students practice on their own time in addition to what is covered in class, which often takes place outside regular school hours.

Old Scona also offers an IB art program, with many talented students whose art is displayed around the school. In the past, students have won local art competitions and had their pieces displayed, for example, in the 2017 Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village.



13 Daughters, Musical Theatre 20/30 Performance
Credit: OSA Photography 2016/17



Fiddler on the Roof, Musical Theatre 10 Performance
Credit: OSA Photography 2016/17

5. Rich Student Life

One of Old Scona's most well-known characteristics is that it is a small school, with a population that hovers around only 360. This allows for a tight-knit community that many graduates cite as one of their favorite aspects of attending Old Scona - over the course of three years of high school, lifelong friendships are made. Students "had a lot of people who knew you personally and quite well enough so that you could be pushed to succeed beyond ... what you thought was possible" (Yasmin Rafiei, OSA alumna headed to Oxford) - close-knit interpersonal relationships provide students with positive support and motivation. One of the things that contributes to the sense of camaraderie at the school is the number of events held and experiences had outside of just academics.

5.1 Clubs

For the 2016-17 school year, Old Scona Academic had an hugely diverse total of 51 official clubs, an impressive ratio to its population of 369 students. Many of these clubs are geared towards humanitarian causes, such as Rotary Club or Brain Care Youth. Others cater to

the interests of students, for example the Society for Surgical Innovation and Medicine, and still others are just for fun, like OSA Super Smash Bros Club or Yoyo Club. Clubs provide important co-curricular opportunities for students to volunteer, to have fun, and simply to spend time with their friends in an otherwise extremely busy environment. All of these clubs are student run and provide opportunities for students to gain leadership skills, as well as outlets to accomplish great things. “School itself made it so easy to get involved, just because there were so many opportunities like clubs...” (Amy Du, alumna applying to medical school). Student leadership plays a major role in facilitating opportunities not only for those who chose to take on leadership roles, but everyone else in the school community who can be exposed to the positive change it brings about.

One major positive attribute of Old Scona that arises from its small population is that students are not relegated to one ‘niche’, such as a certain sport or subject, as might happen at a larger school. The lack of pressure to specialize offers each students a wealth of opportunities that they can take advantage of - for example, sports teams spots are not only reserved for the best, but open to students just wanting to try something new as well. The wealth of clubs at Old Scona contributes to this abundance of opportunity, and goes beyond the school stereotype to allow students to become more well-rounded than solely academic.

5.2 Student Leadership

At Old Scona, the governing student body is the Students’ Union, a democratically elected student government in charge of enriching student life. Students in each social class elect their representatives for each school year, and from those representatives, positions of greater seniority are again elected for the next. Club leadership is also often elected by club members, and any student can start a club with approval from administration. This affords students numerous opportunities to gain experience in leadership as well as agency to accomplish things they want to see done in their community. For example, each year Students’ Union puts on a Spring Carnival, bringing in disadvantaged elementary children from around the area for an afternoon of carnival games, food, and bouncy castles.



Spring Carnival 2017

Credit: Jenny Zhang, OSA Photography 2016/17



Pumpkin carving event!

Credit: OSA

Photography 2016/17

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, Old Scona Academic is an enriching institution of learning whose focus is not only limited to academics. Through extracurricular activities, clubs, student leadership, and countless other opportunities, Old Scona fosters an environment where students can become well-rounded graduates prepared for life in university and beyond. It strives to exemplify its motto “ever to excel” whether in academics, sports, the arts, or volunteerism.



Halloween event! 101 Dalmatians, featuring the school staff as the Dalmatians and Ms. Elder, our principal, as Cruella de Vil.

Credit: Jenny Zhang, OSA Photography 2016/17

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