

## THE FULL LOAD

I hope this message finds our students and families enjoying Spring Break. While the weather hasn't been what I had hoped, we've taken advantage of the break to slow life down a bit. Hope you have, too!

Recently a parent emailed me to ask about offering seniors the “privilege” of attending school half-day. I thought I'd share my answer with you.

First, our current graduation standards require each student to earn a minimum of 26 credits; the state requirements are 23. Even so, many of our students complete most of their required courses by the end of their junior year, and most of the seven courses they take in their senior year are considered electives.

But as a college preparatory school, our emphasis is on maximizing their readiness for college. Our counselors insist on their considering 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year math and science courses, 4<sup>th</sup> year social studies courses, and 3<sup>rd</sup> year language courses, along with required English and religion.

Most of our students, encouraged by parents who want them to be prepared for college, take our advice and challenge themselves during their senior year with advanced courses.

Additionally, our partnerships with ULM's Collegiate Program and the Louisiana Virtual School expand the choices our students have for challenging and interesting classes designed to engage their higher order thinking skills.

Our students enroll in courses on our campus that earn the designation of Dual Enrollment for high school credit and college credit through ULM. Other students, while still SFHS students, enroll part-time in courses at ULM and also have the potential to earn both high school and college credit.

Another benefit of this ULM partnership is giving our students a taste of life on a college campus, and the skills they will need once they transition to that educational level, while they are still high school students. Louisiana Virtual School, a program offered by the State of Louisiana's Department of Education, has given our students a wide array of course choices, including Astronomy and Web Mastering, for high school credit.

Finally, and most importantly, I drew my answer from a portion of the presentation ULM President Dr. James Cofer shared with our parents at a PTO meeting two years ago, which echoed my long-held feelings. Academic research indicates that students who engage in a full, challenging academic schedule their senior year, particularly in mathematics and writing, have a greater chance of graduating from college. The key thought there is “graduating.” It's not just about getting them admitted to college, but about getting them out the other door, so to speak, with a baccalaureate degree.

Having an easy senior year is the dream of practically every student (it was for me!), especially after working so diligently the first three years of high school. If a high school diploma were the ultimate goal, I would tend to agree. But for 99 percent of our students, it is not—a college degree is.

If we are to prepare our students for that larger goal, we must do our part while they're with us. We want to do all we can to optimize their success far beyond the halls of St. Frederick High School. So, we push them a little harder, a little farther, during their senior year, knowing that it has the potential to

pay big dividends in the future. I imagine it as training for a marathon. Thirty-minute daily jogs for a year before the big event is nice, but it won't do much to help a runner cross the finish line in a 26-mile race with a decent time.

I know it's not the news that our students anticipated with this weekly message, but I hope they'll understand that, though it's not always the most "fun" thing, we want what is best for them in the long run.