

Lessons Learned from Performing and Competing

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As the end of the school year approaches, it is not unusual for our seniors to begin counting the number of class days remaining or the number of days until graduation. Our seniors also realize that for them, a number of experiences are taking place for the last time. Two recent events — the ISAS Fine Arts Festival and the Spring Sports Tournament — have come to symbolize the end of our seniors' experiences in the arts and athletic programs. As I witnessed our students working on the stage, in the studio, on the field and on the court, not only was I impressed by what I saw and heard, I was also struck by what our students learned about themselves — the lessons learned by performing and competing. These lessons reinforce my belief that experiences in arts and in athletics are crucial components of a liberal arts education. Three lessons come to mind immediately — lessons that may not always be taught in the academic classroom.

The first lesson, one that is crucial to success in the arts, is taking part in the creative process. Every list of skills and attributes necessary for success in the 21st century includes the ability to think creatively. When students are asked to create, they learn what it means to challenge themselves, they learn to take risks, and they learn to accept failure as an inevitable part of the creative process.

The second lesson, one that is crucial to success in athletics, is the importance of winning and losing. When students are asked to compete — to try their best to win — they learn the importance of preparation, the acceptance of their role on a team, their ability to deal with some outcomes over which they have little or no control, and how to respond emotionally to situations that are, by the very nature of athletics, difficult to deal with.

The third lesson, the one that arts and athletics have in common, is the importance of membership within a group. Whether singing alto in the choir or playing second base on the softball team, learning to contribute toward a shared goal or outcome is crucial to the success of the group. Acceptance of your role within the group, no matter how large or small, and allowing your own personal goals to take a back seat to the goals of the group are lessons that any performer and athlete will take away from his/her experience in arts or athletics.

As our seniors prepare to graduate, they can all look forward to additional challenges in the academic world. For many of them, however, it is possible that they may have sung in their final concert or played in their last softball game. Because of this, the lessons they take with them from their Holland Hall experiences in arts and athletics assume an even greater importance in shaping who they are when they graduate and who they will become as they move on to the next stage of their lives.