

2017

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## Charles E. Shea High School

Shea Government and Public Administration Academy  
*Government and Public Administration Career Cluster*

### OVERVIEW

The Shea Government and Public Administration Academy in Pawtucket, Rhode Island offers rigorous coursework in sociology, psychology, American Government and public administration with robust internship opportunities to fulfill the Pawtucket School Department's belief that education should not only stimulate cognitive and emotional growth, but is necessary for the achievement of democratic ideals dependent upon an informed, responsible, and literate citizenry.

One of the only programs of its kind, The Academy has an articulation agreement with Roger Williams University through which students may attain college credit, supporting their transition to postsecondary education. All students are a part of the only high school-level American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) chapter in the nation.

Student Demographics (21 students)	Percentage
Male	56%
Female	44%
Low-Income	88%
Minority	88%
English language learners	56%

### CREATING A PROGRAM FROM THE GROUND UP

In 2005, the Superintendent of Schools in Pawtucket, Rhode Island challenged his leadership team to develop strategies to improve attendance, increase the academic performance of minority students, contribute to the development and needs of the community, and prepare high school students for careers after graduation. One outcome was the founding of the Shea Government and Public Administration Academy by the Social Studies Chairman at Shea High School. After careful study of the needs and interests, it was determined that the National Career Cluster® Framework offered a meaningful solution if designed well and applied correctly in the classroom.

The school leaders determined that four elements were necessary to create a high-quality program of study: dedication to a unique and quality program of study; strong community partnerships to support a series of work-based learning

experiences; higher education partners to build supported transitions from secondary to postsecondary education; and partnerships with industry leaders to assist in curriculum development.

As an early Academy-model high school program in the Government & Public Administration Career Cluster, there was a dearth of materials in the field aimed at the high school level. "We had to write our own program," explained CTE Coordinator Michael Connolly. "Our partnership with Roger Williams University was extremely helpful in this." Connolly credits the Academy's partnerships with industry and postsecondary leaders as critical to developing a program that would successfully prepare students for both college and careers.



## STUDENTS IMPROVE THEIR COMMUNITY THROUGH REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCES

Service to their surrounding community is a core component of the Academy's program. For example, Shea High School serves an area with a large population that speaks Portuguese-based Cape Verdean Creole – a dialect into which very few governmental resources are translated. Students have worked on a variety of projects from translating videos into Cape Verdean Creole to becoming certified poll workers to help register voters, particularly this population, to better connect them with services available in the community.

Academy students also have opportunities to work with the Rhode Island Secretary of State's Office each year on its mock election effort. The program – "Voters in the Classroom," in which thousands of students from 14 high schools go to polling places set up in their schools and use real ballots and voting machines to decide the answers to student-selected referendum questions – has earned praise and federal grant funding.

## SECRET TO SUCCESS

Connolly attributes much of the program's success to the can-do attitude of program staff. "We are extremely out of the box here. We don't subscribe to the word no. If there's something a student expresses an interest in, we try to figure out how to do it." He advises programs looking to get started to remain flexible and follow student interest. "Continue the core values of the program, but allow it to change as student and community needs change."

## WORK-BASED LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Twice a week, students participate in internships spanning federal, state and city government agencies, as well as nonprofits that are dedicated to the public good, facilitated by the Rhode Island State Internship Program. Mirroring what they'll likely face in the workforce, students present a prepared resume and are interviewed to be selected for an internship placement. They are then placed according to interest areas and receive a second interview by the site supervisor.

Throughout the duration of the internship, students write a weekly journal, are evaluated by their site supervisor every eight weeks, are periodically visited on site by program teachers and perform a self-evaluation. The students bring their skills to the classroom to work on community and school projects and are assigned a work-based learning project at the culmination of the program that is completed in conjunction with Roger Williams University.

"There was no model for this to follow. Public Administration is not taught by anyone at a high school level. Our greatest asset has been the students themselves. They're just tremendous."  
– Michael Connolly, Pawtucket School District CTE Coordinator

## Success by the Numbers



100%

Participated in Work-based Learning



100%

Graduated High School



99%

Enrolled in Postsecondary or Entered the Workforce or Military



100%

Earned an Industry-recognized Credential

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