

Urban Academy



Urban Academy is a small high school on the Julia Richman Education Complex, a campus of six schools in New York City. Since 1993 it has developed its practice to facilitate consistently rigorous learning for its intake of disadvantaged students.

Urban Academy places Art at the centre of its activities: as a medium of self expression for the students, and as a way of understanding the world and developing critical and reflective skills. Art Criticism and Creative Arts are two of the six essential areas students have to demonstrate proficiency in to graduate, along with Literature, Social Studies, Science, and Mathematics.

To engage all students in these subjects, classes are modeled on a college environment. Students from first years to seniors take courses together, choosing options in different orders. In this way new students learn from those who are experienced members of the community; classes are centered on discussion, and important skills such as how to participate in an inquiry-based discussion are passed along from student to student. Older students have a sense of responsibility to set a good example, both in terms of learning, and behavior.

To help motivate students and help all succeed in this mixed-age environment, Urban Academy uses a particularly rich and authentic form of performance assessment that can attend to individual differences while holding students to high standards. Paper, experiments, exhibits, presentations and projects all form part of how students demonstrate proficiency in the key areas.

RisingSun Energy Center



Since 1994, Rising Sun Energy Center has evolved from a small-scale center providing short learning programs about energy efficiency, into a leading provider of green workforce development and retrofit services.

Rising Sun Energy Center is based in Berkeley, Northern California. As an education center, it provides 'green jobs' training to teenagers and young adults, often those who are struggling at school. Energy efficiency and renewables energies are key topics of interest in local area, so there is plenty of work for anyone trained to give advice or provide retrofit services. Rising Sun's work-based training programs equip young people to take on important roles in the community, both before and after they graduate.

The **California Youth Energy Services (CYES)** is a summer program that trains and employs people aged 15-22 to become CYES Energy Specialists. They are then qualified to provide free 'Green House Calls' offering efficiency upgrades to homes in their community.

The **CYES Youth Council** is a year-long part time volunteer program for young people who have worked as CYES Energy Specialists. Local schools have built in the program to their service-learning options.

Participants can then progress to the **Green Energy Training Services**, which equips them for entry-level jobs in the energy efficiency industry. This is an industry-approved course which was developed in partnership with employers, who provide an environment for hands-on training .

Feeniks-koulu



Feeniks-koulu (Phoenix school) is an unofficial school which has non-mandatory attendance. It combines the philosophies of home-schooling and democratic schools with new technology to provide higher quality learning opportunities.

Students at Feeniks-koulu use a specially designed online platform called Data-Builders (or could be translated more directly as 'Knowledge Constructors'). Data Builders has many features with online learning platforms typical in virtual schooling, however, this platform prioritises the need for inner motivation and is designed with a vision of the learner as an independent constructor of knowledge: as far as possible, students are able to choose what they study, by posing questions and seeking out information. The platform is structured by the Finnish school curriculum, and students can track their progress against the goals of the primary school curriculum, but what they learn and when is up to them.

The school runs on a voluntary donation system to fund its activities. Along with use of the online system, this consists of Skype tutoring sessions from the school's group of teachers, and home visits from the student's assigned teacher.

An optional weekly meeting brings all the students, parents and teachers together, to share common practices and decide on the hiring of new tutors, and the offering of local in-person programs. As students get to know each other, they also begin to work together more on the online platform, choosing the same classes and sharing progress together.

Google helpouts



In November 2013, Google launched Helpouts – a platform to enable people to offer as-needed tutoring or coaching via Google hangouts. Hangouts are online spaces where users are connected by video links, and can share documents, typing, and other activity in a shared blank space. Google Hangouts have been used to link learners with educators of various kinds via ‘Education on air’.

Helpouts take offerings one step further in terms of diversity and flexibility. Tutorials are offered for free, or for a cost that may be charged per minute or for a 30 minute or longer session. Users can decide whether they want a whole session, or just a little bit of expert time to help on a particular problem or question.

Offerings are sorted by categories such as ‘Art & Music’, ‘Education & Careers’ and ‘Fitness & Nutrition’, and users can browse or search for the topic they want. Each listing has an introduction, a photo of the helper, and an indication of whether the person is live and available for help. A user then sends a helper a message, or request a particular time for a helpout using the displayed availability calendar. After a helpout, the learner is encouraged to leave a review, and each listing displays the reviews and star ratings from previous users.

Offerings in education cover study skills, language coaching, and subject-specific tuition as well as more general subjects like an introduction to ‘the great books’. Popular Helpers rise to the top of the platform, where they and their topics are found by more users.