



The Island School

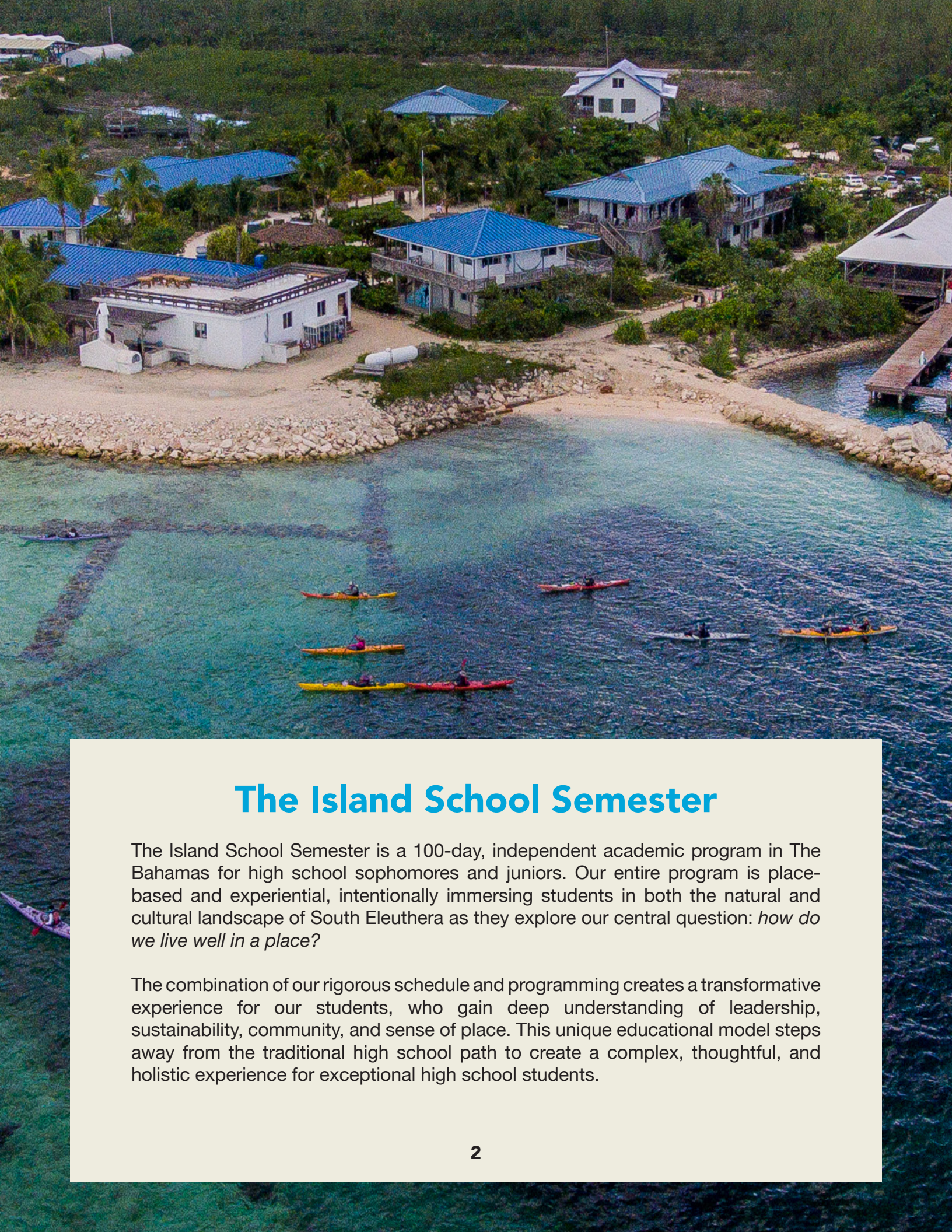
SEMESTER CURRICULUM GUIDE

2026-2027



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The Island School Semester

The Island School Semester is a 100-day, independent academic program in The Bahamas for high school sophomores and juniors. Our entire program is place-based and experiential, intentionally immersing students in both the natural and cultural landscape of South Eleuthera as they explore our central question: *how do we live well in a place?*

The combination of our rigorous schedule and programming creates a transformative experience for our students, who gain deep understanding of leadership, sustainability, community, and sense of place. This unique educational model steps away from the traditional high school path to create a complex, thoughtful, and holistic experience for exceptional high school students.



Mission & Vision

The Island School's mission is a mantra, not a statement; it is a powerful goal that resonates in the minds of every community member. Guiding both the vision and the mission is one central question: *how do we live well in a place?*

Mission: Leadership effecting change.

Vision: The Island School serves as a catalyst in the global transition to a more livable future through:

Developing an intimate sense of place in students through immersion experiences in the natural and cultural environment;

Modeling sustainability of individual lifestyles, larger communities, and the systems that support them;

Creating an intentional community whose members are cognizant of their abilities, limitations, and effect on others.



Teaching Philosophy

Teaching students about their environment, in their environment, is fundamental to The Island School experience. Students are asked to think for themselves, provide answers to their own questions, and practice primary research skills. They exercise these skills in all disciplines; whether through ethnographic interviews, ecological field studies, or creative writing employing critical perspectives. The following principles guide our teaching and learning:

Less is more; we emphasize understanding and applying ideas and skills rather than covering content. By narrowing the focus we develop deeper understandings.

Students are active participants in the learning process. The classroom is a true seminar where everyone shares information. The teacher is a facilitator and guide.

Learning is accelerated when students are pushed outside of their comfort zones. Challenge begets positive growth.

All disciplines emphasize connection to place. Students must be immersed in the environment and challenged to articulate their understanding.

Academic work has real-world applications. There is a real job to complete that raises the bar beyond the quest for a final grade.



Academic Courses

The Semester academic curriculum at The Island School is intended to challenge students' traditional concepts of how, what, and why they learn, while also pushing them to take responsibility for their learning journey. Six days per week, students engage in courses covering science, mathematics, arts and humanities; physical and outdoor education; and cultural immersion experiences, as well as field research and lab work. Faculty continuously assess student work through written feedback and one-on-one conversations. Students are active participants in assessments, as we believe that this feedback and self-assessment is a continuation of the learning process, rather than a reflection of it. The following six courses are reflected on Semester student transcripts. Please note that we included a "frequently transferred as" section to help match our course titles back to those at students' sending schools.

Community & Culture

This immersive course delves into the profound impact culture and community have on our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world. Students will learn to critically evaluate their worldview and how it informs their global perspective. Through exposure to cross-cultural dialogue, anthropological frameworks, and community engagement, we will explore the fundamental question, "what is culture and community?"

To understand a place, we must first acknowledge that any source of historical or cultural information views the world through its own set of personal, cultural, and historical lenses. Students are encouraged to grapple with the discontinuities presented by different perspectives and work to sort competing claims, determine importance, and recognize the problematic nature of interpretations of knowledge. Ultimately, they emerge as globally aware citizens, with a nuanced understanding of their worldview and its implications for navigating diverse communities and cultures.

Frequently transferred as: Social Studies, Anthropology, Humanities, Independent Study: Social Studies & History

Sustainable Systems

We are living in a world of finite resources, and climate change continues to pose new challenges and questions. How we live impacts our surrounding community and environment through choices at the individual and systemic scales. Food, water, energy, and waste systems exist everywhere but operate at differing capacities and achieve different goals and outcomes. Within this course, students will explore these functioning campus systems firsthand and further their understanding of the strengths and opportunities for improvement through applied mathematics. Through the lens of quantitative reasoning, students will address real-time issues and knowledge gaps by utilizing critical thinking skills to analyze, report, and inform their peers and the greater Island School community. The goal is to incite and create change that has positive impacts beyond their 100-day journey to sustain future programs.

Frequently transferred as: Quantitative Reasoning, Applied Mathematics, Particular Topics in Mathematics, Independent Study: Mathematics



Creative Writing & Storytelling

This course is centered around the question: why craft, share, and seek stories? Students will embark on a semester-long journey to document their experience here at The Island School and across the island of Eleuthera by experimenting with poetry, oral storytelling, journalism, flash fiction, and creative nonfiction. Over the course of the semester, students will lean into the writing process and peer workshopping to revise and rethink their drafts. As their sense of self and place strengthens, so, too, will their skills as writers and storytellers. Each student will depart the course with their own creative writing portfolio and an understanding that stories are powerful tools for sharing knowledge, making connections, and finding meaning.

Frequently transferred as: English/Language Arts, English Composition, Creative Writing, Independent Study: English



Elements of Ecology

In this course, students will learn about the interactions between species and their environment through immersive experiences within our local marine ecosystems. The class focuses on the equilibrium that exists in ecosystems, and the impacts that disruptions to this equilibrium can have on both species and humans who rely on them. Classes occur primarily in the field, wading through mangrove creeks, scuba diving on coral reefs, and snorkeling on seagrass beds.

Through closer examination of uses and challenges in the marine environment of South Eleuthera, we evaluate the difficulties of effectively managing natural resources. Throughout the semester, students will create and refine an ecology field guide to demonstrate their understanding of key ecological concepts, record their ecological and societal interactions, and reaffirm their capabilities as natural observers that can create impactful change. Students will work towards tangible outcomes such as creating awareness campaigns to promote the culturally and ecologically important Queen Conch and the value of creating a sustainable future for South Eleuthera and its inhabitants.

Frequently transferred as: Ecology, Environmental Science, Marine Science, Integrated Science, Independent Study: Science



Art & Movement

Establishing a sense of place is the foundation of the Art and Movement course. The curriculum is designed to foster connections between art, place, and culture. Students will learn alongside local artists, be exposed to Bahamian art forms, and engage in the arts including music, dance, and physical art applications. Through this course students will develop the ability to engage the local community and the environment while communicating through artistic language both on The Island School campus and within the greater Eleuthera community. Art is a space where students can process and creatively express their connections to other pieces of their Island School journey.

Frequently transferred as: Creative Art, Integrated Fine Art, Independent Study: Art

Scientific Research

The Island School is uniquely positioned to offer students the opportunity to conduct scientific research at our own research station, the Cape Eleuthera Institute (CEI). CEI is a dedicated center for research and innovation where students engage with professionals in the field on authentic research projects, including marine science and sustainability research that informs policy in The Bahamas and beyond. This course offers a unique opportunity for students to apply what they learn across disciplines to a field-based project of local and regional significance. Students work alongside researchers conducting and communicating results from real scientific research initiatives. The research program epitomizes The Island School mission and vision of creating opportunities for students to produce work that has important consequences for the local, scientific, and global communities.

The outcome of their fieldwork always raises more questions and students grapple with their findings to produce reasonable explanations for their observations and logical recommendations for future work. Throughout this course, students study background rationale and study design, data collection and analysis, and communication of results. They examine a specific topic, pose a testable question, implement a research plan, collect and analyze data, and present their findings during a research symposium at the end of the semester.

Frequently transferred as: Scientific Research & Design, Independent study: Science





Elements of Our Curriculum

Programming is a crucial part of our academic curriculum and pushes students into the field, environment, and surrounding community. The overlap and cross-curricular experiences work in conjunction to create the full semester experience and enhance self-discovery, and intellectual and physical growth. Each of the programming elements described below contributes to the holistic curriculum and transformative individual experiences. Not only do students spend five mornings each week training for either a half-marathon or four-mile open ocean swim, but they also participate in three and eight-day sea kayaking expeditions and earn their PADI Open Water Diver certification. These daily physical activities and expeditions take place around the 100-acre peninsula of Cape Eleuthera, on which we live, and along the shores of South Eleuthera.

Community Engagement

Community Engagement is a critical component of the intercultural connection programs at The Island School Semester. Whereas the students spend some time in the Community and Culture course developing a conceptual understanding of intercultural communication, the time spent with our Deep Creek Middle School students and apprenticeship mentors, as well as on Down Island Trips and collaboration across the organization with local and international staff, allows students to put those understandings into practice. Ultimately, students learn some of the most important skills necessary to be a successful leader— empathy and communication. Community Engagement is structured to assure that students from the Semester and Deep Creek Middle School, as well as our other Deep Creek Lab Schools, are provided with ample and regular time to learn from each other throughout their time together. For Semester students, much of this time is dedicated to structured activities that encourage students to learn from and about one another.

Down Island Trips

Down Island Trips (DIT) contribute to students' cultural and historical understanding of The Bahamas. Toward the end of the semester, students travel in small groups northward traversing the 110-mile-long island for several nights. DIT explores geological, historical, and cultural sites across the island, bringing to life many of the topics explored in academic courses.

Sea-Kayaking & Solo

Sea-kayaking expeditions are a key facet of our place-based education model, during which students interact with the coastal environment of South Eleuthera. Expeditions provide students the platform to learn essential hard skills involved in sea-kayaking and leave-no-trace camping while building the soft skills associated with leadership. Students take turns leading their pod through the day's route, selecting and setting up a campsite, cooking meals collaboratively, and learning about themselves and each other through various activities. On expeditions, students participate in a 48-hour solo experience. The solo experience is not designed to be a survival test, it is, however, a time for students to engage in reflection and spend time alone with their thoughts. The ability to reflect on our thoughts and critically analyze our actions and decisions are fundamental aspects of experiential education. While each student will have a unique solo experience, all students undergo this journey, ultimately strengthening community bonds.

Leadership

To develop leadership, the most important principle that guides our actions is trusting individuals with real responsibility and leaving room for failure. Leadership is interwoven into everything that we do at The Island School—there are numerous times in any day when students have an opportunity to step into leadership roles. The process of feedback is intentionally structured throughout the semester through three phases of leadership development: teaching, feedback, and transference. During the teaching phase, a primary focus is building trust through taking calculated risks and challenging students to explore realms outside their comfort zone. Students also receive leadership coaching. Several mechanisms—rubrics for class discussions, debriefs from expeditions, and informal conversations—provide avenues for students to receive feedback on their progress. In the end, though, the development of leadership in an individual is a personal journey propelled by challenge. For this reason, the best assessor is the individual themselves. Finally, transference of leadership skills happens when students return home and are challenged to apply what they've learned to their individual communities.





Endurance Training

The morning exercise program (commonly referred to as AMX) includes the entire community—students and staff alike—and consists of at least one hour participating in a variety of workouts five days a week. Most exercises include a combination of swimming, running, and calisthenics; other offerings center on team sports such as water polo, volleyball, or ultimate frisbee, while yoga and snorkeling opportunities develop mental fortitude and wellness. In addition, our regular morning exercise takes place across Cape Eleuthera where we live and serves as an added way to connect with and explore our environment. By the third week of the semester, students decide on a specialized course of training in preparation for one of two pinnacle challenges: a half-marathon or four-mile “super swim.” Three workouts per week are dedicated to this effort, with one day set aside as a long exercise. Other notable workouts include a series of timed “run-swims” which allows students to track their personal progress throughout the semester. Regardless of the exercise, the focus of endurance training at The Island School is self-challenge and individual improvement. Please note that this course is included on student transcripts as a physical education (P.E.) credit.

Scuba

Instrumental to the Semester journey, scuba provides students with an opportunity to explore the beautiful underwater environment that surrounds Eleuthera. Treated the same as any class, students must complete bookwork and demonstrate proficiency in several underwater skills. The scuba program supports our entire curriculum, where students use diving as a tool to access and better understand our marine environment, to inspire creative writing, and to improve leadership skills. By the end of the term, most students acquire a PADI Open Water Diver certification and log upward of five dives.



Sustainability

Since its inception in 1999, The Island School has contributed to a global mindset and best practices through practical application and experimentation. During this time, we have learned that sustainability involves much more than recycling waste streams or reducing energy consumption. The environmental component is important, to be sure, but it cannot stand alone. True sustainability begins with individual lifestyles and requires a commitment from every member of the community to embrace the challenge of personal change. Students learn that sustainability is a collective endeavor that demands flexibility in thought, attitude, and behavior. More importantly, they learn the value of sacrifice—not for ascetic purposes, but out of humility, respect, and fairness for the rest of the living world and future generations. The infrastructure of the school is another constant reminder of the value we place on sustainability and students must confront the realities of sustainable living in The Bahamas at every point in their day; whether it be through their participation in our daily use of composting, or understanding how to sort resources, students are exposed to opportunities to contribute to a more sustainable community and lifestyle.

Demonstration of Learning

The Demonstration of Learning (DOL) is a forum, administered twice a semester, at which students are challenged to discuss and show what they have gained through their experience. This can focus on academic achievements, personal growth, specific learning opportunities, or challenges overcome and obstacles navigated. In preparation for their DOL, students are asked to pause, reflect, and thoughtfully consider what, why, and how they have made steps toward growth. As a central tenet of our leadership curriculum, this process helps students to look inward and consider relationships with others, who they are, and who they want to be.

In their DOL, students speak to experiences they have had throughout their journey — what was most significant to them, themes that have occurred, and how that knowledge connects with the student's life; at The Island School, at school, at home, and in the world at large. The presentations from our students are as varied and multidimensional as the students themselves. Though given broad questions to guide them, the onus is on the students to reflect on their journey and decide what stands out. This is an opportunity for students to bring their work portfolio to life. Presentations can entail a focus on self and personal growth, energy systems and sustainability, leadership, historical realizations, or creativity; the possibilities are endless. The DOL is an opportunity for students to appreciate the intrinsic worth of learning. This is intended to be a capstone experience for everyone— discussants and presenters alike.

