Marin Academy

TRANSDISCIPLINARY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

INFORMATION AND APPLICATION

Transdisciplinary Leadership Program Overview

The Marin Academy Transdisciplinary Leadership Program (TLP) is an academic opportunity for focused engagement in real-world issues and problem-solving. The program, available for current juniors to apply for their senior year, has two main components:

1. A full-year course co-taught by two teachers, where students will explore an issue or problem in depth in order to build context for action. This will culminate in the spring semester when students work with a community partner to explore the questions posed by the course and, informed by their own interests related to these questions, will be involved in meaningful, real-world work. This will continue during their senior project in May.

2. A concurrent full-year practicum course that will meet one block per rotation during the fall and up to two blocks per rotation during the spring where students will develop and practice their leadership skills, interact with guest speakers, participate in field trips, work on design challenges, or extend the work of their classes.

Through these components, students will both develop skills and knowledge and put them into immediate practice. Specifically, students will:

- Understand the nuances and complexities of societal issues, the different ways experts are approaching them, and the experiences of the people affected
- Strengthen empathy, cultural competency, and agency while harnessing natural curiosity
- Partner with institutions of higher learning, non-profit organizations, local government officials or agencies, and/or companies
- Develop and design projects that bring a perspective of inclusivity and equity to complex problems
- Transfer and apply existing skills and knowledge while learning new skills and content within, between, and beyond academic disciplines

TRANSDISCIPLINARY LEARNING

Education in the 21st century is evolving towards transdisciplinary learning, which centers around an authentic, relevant, and complex issue, and invites students to operate within, between, and beyond disciplines to address this issue. Assessments will address these relevant issues and be presented to an authentic audience for feedback and for continued reflection and revision.

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LEADERSHIP

As the name implies, leadership is central to this course. A common myth surrounding leaders and leadership is that it is a trait that someone either has or doesn't. That is not the case. Research consistently shows that leadership is a dynamic quality developed through experience. It is an action, not a position; there are many different kinds of leaders. This course has been intentionally designed to help students cultivate, strengthen, and apply their leadership skills as they progress through the course.

INDEPENDENCE AND COOPERATION

The transdisciplinary course demands that students work both independently and cooperatively. Students will create team projects and must be accountable to self, team, and outside agency or organization. They will be working with deadlines, but with a fair amount of autonomy, which means they need to be able to effectively manage their time, prioritize, and communicate. During community project work, your teachers are there to support, guide, and coach.

COMMUNITY PROJECT

At the end of second semester, all seniors are required to complete a 3-week, 90-hour senior project. For students in TLP, this project will be a continuation of their TLP community project and will be spent implementing their work and putting it into practice in the real world. The senior project is an opportunity to turn an understanding of context into action.

Student Testimonials

"The best thing about this class is you aren't just learning about what you "can" do to make change, we actually go out into the community and do it."

"In TLP...I grew my leadership and collaborative skills. I feel really confident now in working with others and taking action."

"I feel like I have so much more empathy and social awareness. I have picked up on climate issues in my daily life, in the news, on the way to school, etc."

"I have seen...that climate justice is all around us and every one of us can do something to help change the world."

"(In) most classes, teachers tell you what they know. In this class, there is so much discussion, we get to talk and think together. I don't think people realize how revolutionary transdisciplinary learning is."

"I will remember TLP as the most conscious, exciting, interesting, and relevant class (I took)."

TRANSDISCIPLINARY LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Important Dates

April 1, 2025: Applications Due by 10:00pm
May 7, 2025: Applicants Notified
Friday, August 22, 2025: TLP Leadership Retreat on Campus (9-3)

Eligibility Requirements

All current juniors are eligible to apply to the TLP. We're building a team of students who want to:

- Collaborate more effectively
- Grow and apply their leadership skills
- Take initiative with real-world issues
- Cultivate more curiosity, compassion, self-direction, and a sense of purpose

It is essential, however, that students consider their senior-year priorities before applying. TLP requires commitment to all of the following components:

- Attend the August leadership retreat;
- Prioritize the course over other electives options in their schedule;
- Carry out the program's capstone as their senior project.

SUPPLEMENTAL COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Because this is a leadership course, you will be expected to do some things that go above and beyond what you would normally do in your classes at MA. Some examples include: a required summer reading book, attending and presenting at community events, presenting at Open House and Conference on Democracy, missing assemblies, and meeting with guest speakers and community partners.

Applicants are required to fill out the general application, submit written responses, and have the approval of their advisor and a parent/guardian.

FAQs

Q: I want to apply to this program, but I don't know when other courses I want/need to take will be offered. What if they are in conflict?
A: We will be building the schedule after students are accepted into the program to maximize student offerings and are ensuring that upper level visual and performing art, math, and world language classes are available to students who need/want them. It is important to note that very few seniors—literally fewer than a half a dozen each year—get all the classes and schedule they hope for. Almost all seniors have to prioritize their choices and end up having to choose between their hoped-for science, history, and English electives, for example. Students who apply to TLP are prioritizing the transdisciplinary course, which will count for one 2 electives (see course description for more information).

Q: What does the class + practicum mean for my overall schedule?
A: While TLP will appear on your schedule for two blocks, the practicum is time set aside to support your TLP class, not a second course load of homework. You will be able to sign up for up to five other courses, however, our recommendation is four other courses in the fall semester as you prepare you college applications; as always, we encourage you to discuss your overall schedule with your Advisor.

Q: I already have ideas about my senior project. Will I be able to create my own senior project?
A: Like students in the MARC program, TLP students' senior projects will be the work that they are doing with their community partners for this course. So students don't need to worry about creating their own project!

Q: Is this program UC approved?
A: Yes. The UC system will recognize these courses on a transcript. (See above)

Q: How do colleges and universities view this program?
A: While developing this program, over 25 college admissions offices— Bates, Colorado College, Duke , Harvard, UCLA, Yale, and others—weighed in with unanimous support. They shared the following comments:

> *"We appreciate when students are able to think for themselves and act in the real world. Many students are so rubric focused they think there is a 'right' answer and consequently have difficulty dealing with our messy reality."*
>
> *"... it would add great depth to learning for your students. This is something ...needed in redesigning the way we have this generation of students think and collaborate."*
>
> *"[Our college] promotes an interdisciplinary education and I think a lot of students at MA are already thinking in this way. It would be awesome to see this implemented in the curriculum in this way."*
>
> *"It would be unique to your institution and make your students stand out."*
>
> *"[Our university] is a research-driven environment that endorses hands-on learning ... (and) we instead encourage students to explore and combine areas of academia in unique ways. This type of curriculum would be similar to what we offer."*

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Courses for 2025-26

Cultivating Justice: Food, Sustainability, and Equity in a Changing Climate
Credits: Science (1.0)
Essential Questions: What are the historical roots of our current food systems, and how can interrogating these legacies help us reimagine equitable and sustainable practices in the face of a changing climate? What systemic injustices contribute to disparities in access to healthy and sustainable food, and how can communities take actionable steps to create equitable solutions? Whose voices are at the table when it comes to our current food systems? What messages are we seeing about food and health that impact our agriculture systems and policies?
Course Description: "To transform our food systems, we must first understand the forces that shaped them. The legacy of colonization, industrialization, and globalization has defined what food is, who has access to it, and how it is produced. Challenging these systems requires historical awareness, policy analysis, and grassroots action." This course invites students to explore food justice as a critical intersection of sustainability and social equity. Through academic inquiry, hands-on engagement, and policy discussions, students will analyze how power, privilege, and historical legacies shape access to nutritious food and sustainable agricultural practices. We will collaborate with local community gardens, food justice organizations, and policymakers to examine real-world challenges and solutions. By integrating research, place-based learning, and community engagement, students will develop the awareness, skills, and leadership abilities necessary to advocate for just, resilient, and sustainable food systems.

Government and Technology: Reshaping Society in the Digital Age
Credits: Honors History (0.5) and English (0.5)
Essential Questions: What personal, social, and governmental challenges might we face with new innovations/changes/advancements in digital technology? In what ways does digital technology create, alleviate, and complicate social hierarchies, oppressive systems, and new opportunities? How might we as individuals, communities, and governments, and societies approach existing and upcoming digital technologies in order to create a safe, inclusive, just, equitable, and democratic digital society?
Course Description: Every day, your pocket, your desk, your doorbell, your calendar, your options, and your choices are influenced, shaped, and manipulated by the vast (and constantly growing powers) of digital technologies, algorithms, and artificial intelligence. And every day, local, state, and federal governments scramble to create, revise, and remove policy, regulations, guidelines, and programs in response to the ever-changing digital landscape. In this course, students will interrogate the role of digital technologies in our personal lives, our communities, our governments, and our society. They will also gain an understanding of the structures, functions, and philosophies of the American government in order to consider past, present, and future governmental interventions in the world of technology. Finally, students will collaborate with community partners and elected officials in order to consider how we can co-create a safer, more inclusive, and more just world.

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Public Health: Socioeconomics, Human Biology, and Media

Credits: Math (0.5) and Science (0.5)

Essential Questions: What is the role of socioeconomic history, especially in the United States, in determining ongoing disparities in health care and outcomes? How have these economic disparities acted biologically to cause current health disparities in communities, as became clear during the COVID-19 pandemic? What actions can we take to highlight and mitigate health disparities rooted in socioeconomic factors in our communities, including the role of local journalism with an emphasis on data journalism, to highlight public health messaging and reach audiences who most need it?

Course Description: Students will examine the intersection of socioeconomic factors, human biology, and public health communications in determining health outcomes and driving ever-widening disparities in health care. In this course, students will gain deep insights into economics as it relates to and feeds health disparities and its role in driving solutions to these inequities. Some (socio)economics issues students will explore include the historical arc of access barriers in healthcare and the link between geography and socioeconomic disadvantages (such as housing, food deserts, healthcare deserts). These factors act through biological processes to affect health, and through analysis of case studies and readings, students will gain an understanding of how these factors act on human biology in influencing health outcomes. Exacerbating these disparities is the increasing failure of communication and access to information about public health guidance, preventative care, and other crucial messaging that communities need to optimize health. Students will study the role of media and communications in closing health gaps and how the economics of local/regional journalism has intensified these inequities. They will examine the potential for new forms of journalism, such as data journalism, to address this problem and engage in aspects of how freedom of the press and funding of the press are crucial pillars of health equality and equity. Actions that this class will emphasize, working with community partners, include (1) engagement with local officials to foreground these issues on their agendas based on compelling, data-driven storytelling grounded in human biology with a compelling economic foundation, (2) exploring avenues of funding/revenue for local/regional journalism to cover these issues and highlight local health entities and nonprofits, and (3) development and communication of cost-saving strategies that lower barriers to healthcare access with digital tools and solutions.

TLP Practicum (Required companion to the TLP course)

Credit: Transdisciplinary (0.5; Pass/Fail)

Course Description: This course will run concurrently with the TLP class and is a flexible meeting time to support the work of the program. It will meet once per rotation in the fall semester and up to twice per rotation in the spring semester.

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Please fill out and submit the application here.

Part 1: Essay Questions (Choose one question from each section to answer in 175-250 words.)

1. Collaboration: Provide an example of a time when you encountered differing opinions or ideas within a team. How did you navigate these differences to achieve a common goal? OR Share a situation where you had to compromise or adapt your approach to accommodate the needs and perspectives of your teammates. What did you learn from the experience?
2. Curiosity: How do you explore new ideas or perspectives outside of your regular coursework? OR When has your curiosity led you to discover something new or unexpected?
3. Compassion: Describe a time when you actively supported a cause or advocated for a group in your community. What motivated you to take action, and what impact did your efforts have? OR Describe a challenging situation where you had to mediate a conflict or resolve a disagreement between peers. How did you demonstrate empathy and facilitate a positive resolution?
4. Please provide the name of one adult on campus to serve as a reference for your application.

Part 2: Course Preference

Please indicate your level of interest in the courses and rank your course preferences.

Part 3: Requirements

The TLP Program has three components. The following questions are based on your understanding of and ability to commit to them. You will confirm your understanding of these requirements.

1. Can you make yourself available to attend a full day TLP orientation in August?
2. Are you committed to the expectations of the TLP course, including summer reading book, senior project, and other outside activities as required by the course?
3. The TLP course (class + concurrent practicum) will meet during two blocks on EFG days in our every-other-day schedule. This offers both opportunity and challenges; please initial to signify your understanding of some of these.
    - ☐ I understand that MA commits to my ability to take any higher level math, world language, and arts classes during my senior year. I am also aware that by reserving these two blocks in my schedule, there will be restrictions in other elective offerings that will fit in my schedule including science, English, and history.
    - ☐ I understand that on an every-other-day schedule, the two-block nature of the TLP course (class + practicum) allows for flexible use of time between those blocks during EFG days, including taking this time to be off campus. This may occasionally result in missing Assembly.

Part 4: Signatures

Please plan to have a conversation with your parent(s)/guardian about your application to TLP.

1. I have spoken with my parent(s)/guardian about my TLP application and they understand its requirements.
2. I have spoken with my Advisor about my TLP application and understand how it will impact my other course offerings available to me my senior year.