



West Potomac Academy, Fairfax County Public Schools 10th–12th Grades

Location

- Fairfax County, VA

The Situation

- West Potomac Academy offers high school students advanced specialized classes in television production.
- The school chose Avid products because they wanted their students to learn on industry-standard equipment.

The Program

- All students complete four projects—a TV commercial, a public service announcement, a news story, and a film and enter a contest.
- Students are also given opportunities for projects in animation and working on a talk show.

The Results

- Most students in the program continue their TV and video production education in two- and four-year colleges, while others go directly to work in the television industry.

Television Production: The Way We Communicate Now

The West Potomac Academy offers students opportunities to take advanced, specialized classes in the areas of health and human services or communication and the arts. Part of West Potomac High School, its student body draws from 17 Fairfax County public high schools. Seven years ago, Fairfax County selected television production as the focus for the Academy for a good reason: “It’s the way that we communicate now. Even though the technology is expensive and changes, we have to teach it to the students to make that next generation of graduating seniors capable of participating in that field,” explained Nancy Mantelli, Professional TV Production Instructor. The District chose Avid because they “wanted industry-standard equipment.”

Academy Students Work Like the Pros

Junior and senior students study in the career program for one or two years. While many continue their education in 2- or 4-year colleges, some actually enter full-time employment in fields related to their Academy study after graduation. Students in the program work on Avid equipment, and they are taught techniques to find work in the field. West Potomac requires all students to complete four projects—a TV commercial, a public service announcement, a news story, and a film—as well as entering a contest. Students are also given opportunities for projects in animation and working on a talk show. Giving back, the production program provides services to Fairfax County Schools, recording video of spring plays, concerts, and school functions. Students learn to:

- Do extensive research
- Write a treatment to tell the story
- Create a storyboard
- Develop shot lists
- Scout locations
- Work with audio levels
- Use interview skills
- Use editing skills
- Add sound and music
- Add credits

“Doing the research that the District did, one reason they chose Avid is because they wanted industry-standard equipment.”

Nancy Mantelli, Professional Television Production Instructor



Learning Skills that Bring Results

Previously, Mantelli's graduates most often moved on to 2-year colleges or trade schools. “Last year, I had 6 students go to film school—some kids take it, and they fall in love with it.” Choosing “U.S. incarceration rates” as the answer to “Mr. Obama, this is the most important problem facing your administration today,” one student won an honorable mention in an international contest sponsored by C-SPAN with more than 2,000 entrants. “He did the research, interviewed great people, and edited it all on Avid,” said Mantelli.

Recently, students from West Potomac Academy won first place in the state in the video category of the SkillsUSA: Champions At Work competition. They will represent Virginia in the 46th annual National Leadership and Skills Conference in Kansas City. More than 14,000 students, teachers, education leaders, and representatives from more than 1,100 national corporations, trade associations, businesses, and labor unions will attend the event.

