

Sacred Hearts Academy

Grades PreK–12
Honolulu, Hawaii
Private/Urban
Enrollment 1,134

Women Building a Better Tomorrow

Just two years shy of being a century old, Sacred Hearts Academy, a Roman Catholic college preparatory school for girls in beautiful Honolulu, Hawaii, is an amazing paradox. On one hand, its compassionate students firmly uphold the beliefs set forth by its founders; on the other, these young women have their feet firmly entrenched in the twenty-first century by becoming social activists and advocates for gender equity.

A visitor to halcyon Sacred Hearts Academy, situated on the Kaimuki hillside, just a short trip from Waikiki Beach, first experiences a sense of being in an older, gentler age. Perhaps it is the architecture, with its cream-colored stucco walls and red tile roof, reminiscent of a Spanish mission; perhaps it is the friendly student body, ranging from tykes to teens, all neatly dressed in crisp, spanking uniforms; perhaps it is the unhurrying attitude of its faculty and staff, each one taking the time to nod and

welcome a stranger with a warm “Aloha.” Gradually, as the visitor moves through the campus, passing through the newly opened McKeough Art Center, a modern visual arts facility donated by a benefactor in memory of his wife, a somewhat different sense of this school begins to develop. Guided by a nurturing faculty, the students are engaged in exceptionally rigorous academic studies that prompt them to question and think for themselves so they can take their place as leaders in an ever-changing world.

At the commencement exercise, head of school Betty White stated that “a beautiful world” is at the fingertips of the graduates. But she also pointed out that “with a push on the remote channel changer,” they will be “transported to war, hunger, poverty, despair, and anguish.” White’s assertion, “We know that a child born in the United States has a life expectancy of 78.6 years, and a child born in Sierra Leone has a life expectancy of 38 years,” was a call to action to help others less fortunate. Clearly, this school is not training its students to be passive and compliant observers in life; Sacred Hearts Academy seriously expects its graduates to undertake a formidable challenge: to be the builders of a better tomorrow.

A Mission of Commitment and Compassion

Sister Katherine Miller, the campus minister who has worked at the school for thirty-five years, explains that the name of the school, Sacred Hearts, refers to Jesus and Mary, who serve as role models to the students. Sister Katherine points out that the virtues demonstrated by these two exemplars—“respect for human dignity, unconditional love and forgiveness, and service as an expression of nobility”—are “ethical values that are very much needed today.” Therefore, *commitment* to this compassionate love of God serves as the first value that the Academy aims to instill in its students. The other three principles the school wants its students to embrace are *to take responsibility for their own lives, to contribute positively to the world around them, and to value life-long learning.*



SHA students celebrate their cultural heritage in a local parade.

A member of the school's Board of Directors and a parent of three daughters at the Academy, Randy Perreira says, "This school is hard to duplicate; the bond is different, there is a strong sense of community in the school, community service and values, and tremendous interaction with staff and faculty." Many students are second- and even third-generation Sacred Hearts Academy (SHA) students, because the family feels such a strong attachment to the school. Jaclyn Park, whose mother and grandmother both attended here, is currently a student at the University of Hawaii but often returns, saying, "Since kindergarten, this has been my second home."

There is no doubt that students care for one another; the close bond between students is palpable in both the lower school (primary) and upper school (intermediate and high school) students. As a family, the entire school community, some 1,200 strong, gathers together each morning for the flag salute and a student-composed prayer. Inclusion is more than a concept; it is an integral part of school culture. For example, every student in Barbara Carnate's and Michelle Tuzon's second-grade classes proudly signed the banners that declare *We want our class to be a friendly, safe, and caring place* and *Be friends and work hard*. Students at all levels intentionally include newcomers in their activities. Victoria, a senior student, shares that when a new student enrolls in the school, others are quick to say, "Come sit with us." Cross-age tutoring also helps to engender a spirit of caring among different grade levels. Tiffany, who volunteers as a teacher's assistant in the junior kindergarten class, says that initially she did this for a work-study program, but now she volunteers on her own time because she enjoys "the special feeling of helping others."

The Academy has worked hard to build a caring community, one in which, as White says, "each student feels a sense of belonging, a feeling that 'I matter.'" Through Project Connect, children in the lower school develop skills and ease in speaking to one another in guided group meetings called Ohana Circles. Advisory groups in the upper school provide time for sharing of accomplishments, fears, and concerns. When asked what was special about her school, graduating senior Alyssa says, "The best thing is the close relationships students have with teachers and classmates. We are able to talk not only about

The Proof Is in the Data

How we know character education is working at Sacred Hearts Academy:

- Sacred Hearts Academy students contributed over 60,000 hours of service to their community last year.
- The Assessment of Catholic Religious Education (ACRE), given to students in grades 5, 8, 9, and 11 in 2002 and 2007, reveals positive student attitudes toward morality, practice of ethical behavior, and relationships with peers.
- Accreditation reports (2003) by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), and the Hawaiian Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) gave high praise to SHA in areas such as philosophical foundation, curriculum and instruction, and student personal and academic growth.
- Parent, teacher, and student self-evaluation surveys for accreditation processes reveal a high degree of satisfaction with the implementation of values, cooperative learning, and teacher satisfaction.
- Alumnae follow-up studies and testimonials from graduates disclose satisfaction with being of service to others and continued volunteerism through college and beyond.
- Each year, the rate of bullying, stealing, and disciplinary infractions is low.

school but about problems we may be having outside of school."

Character in the Curriculum

Lest anyone think that teaching ethical values is synonymous with teaching religion, Sister Katherine points out that character building takes place in every class. For example, in Cindie Ogata's English class, students examine the serious issue of racism in *The Watsons Go to Birmingham* and the injustice revealed in Spike Lee's 1997 documentary *4 Little Girls*. Analyzing an individual's reaction to adversity also engages students in absorbing discussions on ways to develop inner strength. Cydrienne, a senior, found that the discussion accompanying the study of *The Color of Water* made her proud to be in the sisterhood of women who fought against the odds. Curricular connections to character development

PRINCIPAL'S BEST PICKS: Betty White

TWO WORDS TO DESCRIBE YOUR SCHOOL: *energetic* and *caring*

CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM/PROJECT OF WHICH YOU ARE MOST PROUD: annual retreats for students in grades 6 to 12, which are organized by student leaders and provide an ideal milieu for spiritual bonding

BEST PROOF THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION CHANGES SCHOOL CLIMATE: Students demonstrate caring for one another, with no evidence of bullying and teasing.

EVIDENCE THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION HAS ENHANCED ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT: Almost one-third of the students now attain honors recognition for their grades.

WORDS OF WISDOM TO A NEWCOMER IN CHARACTER EDUCATION: *Focus on one or two values. Go slowly, one by one, and model what you believe.*

occur in other disciplines as well. Dawn Shinoki-Ho's sixth-grade math students practice team building and cooperation through solving problems collaboratively. Rosemary Summers, a performing arts teacher, emphasizes that the way students behave with one another, their interactions in groups, and their appreciation of one another are also ways of illustrating character.

White, who also serves as a trustee on the board of the National Coalition of Girls' Schools, believes that it is important "to instill in girls a confidence that they can do anything and be anything." As a result, SHA has been in the vanguard in initiating programs that foster female achievement in traditionally male bastions. Two forums that the Academy has hosted, a Girls' Financial Literacy Conference and a Science Symposium for Girls, have drawn female students from all over Hawaii. SHA girls have countered gender stereotyping by designing and building an underwater robot for a pre-engineering class and constructing and testing an electric vehicle for a Hawaiian Electric Company competition. Imbued with a mission to *contribute positively to the world around them*, Academy students stretch beyond their comfort zone to achieve this goal.

Spiritual Growth through Service

"The Academy encourages us to reach out to the community through service projects and extra-curricular activities, which gives us a perspective about the world at large," says graduating senior Caroline. A National Service-Learning Leader School since 2001, the school considers community service to be a vital part of quality education. Students in the lower school generally do service projects as a class; every student in grades 7–12 is asked to fulfill a minimum of 25 hours of community service each year. Many accumulate well over that number. Last year, in fact, Academy students gave over 60,000 hours of service, with many spending their summer vacation doing volunteer work. Students may design their own service project, but partnerships with organizations exist in seven main areas: hospitals and clinics, nursing care homes, health organizations, children and youth programs, social service programs, nature and environmental programs, and educational agencies. Reflection is an intrinsic part of the experience; each student constructs a portfolio of her responses each quarter.

When Eleni, a student who transferred to SHA, first experienced the extent of student engagement in community service, she was amazed. She was amazed, too, that no one bullied her for being Tongan, and figured there must be some real connection between helping others and being nice. Eleni says that her involvement in the Lancer Christian Community at SHA has impelled her to become even more involved in her own non-Catholic church, where she raises money for schools in Tonga. Valerie, a senior who serves as Student Council president this year, says her experiences as a teacher's assistant provided her with "a way to see the world with the eye of a child and to understand how kids learn differently." The many clubs at SHA—such as Zonta and Soroptimist, which are affiliated with parent organizations in Hawaii—support a multitude of community-service projects.

But students are not the only ones who practice the philosophy of giving back to the community. The Academy's faculty dedicates both time and effort to help the less fortunate. Ten-year veteran Leo Delgado, who teaches theology and social justice, has traveled to the Philippines to help on the Aloha Medical Mission. Delgado, the force behind many impressive social work projects, says, "The school is supportive of causes I get involved in. They back me up, and,

because of that, I inspire the girls and they inspire me back.” Another tireless worker is Dr. Mimi Dang, an advanced physics instructor who visited Vietnam with her husband. Upon her return, she became “determined that SHA students could contribute and make a difference.” She is organizing her own “relief fund” to help impoverished Vietnamese and is currently working with her students on devising ways that they can help. Dang shared that one of the best things about SHA is “administrative support, cooperation, and the ability to nurture students toward high dreams.” Other staff members echoed Dang’s praise, saying administrative support has helped to make service a life-long habit. Parent and SHA alumna Sheryl Chun reveals that she continued her volunteer work in college and that it helped her build and strengthen relationships.

Leading by Example: Teachers, Students, Parents

“Leading by example” serves as an apt description of the way in which respect, service, and compassion are woven into the fabric of school life. Science department chair Nancy Rocheleau states that staff members view themselves as “tremendous role models” and that a visitor to the school sees only “the tip of the iceberg, a dusting of what we do.” The faculty, too, demonstrates the special bond that unites the SHA students. Physical education instructor Sandy Richardson describes the staff’s synergy: “We gather to enjoy each other’s company and are seated purposely in collaborative groups.” Parent Sandee Higuchi adds, “This is an encouraging atmosphere, seeds are planted, and students are taught by the staff to be accountable for their actions.” Graduating senior Shaina says, “My teachers here have a passion for learning. They do more than just teach; they encourage us to reach for our dreams and nurture us into becoming adults.” One of the ways the school nurtures its students to become adults is by training them to lead, through work in peer groups, the Student Council, and the annual retreats. For example, peer leaders conduct highly successful life skills sessions for students in grades 7–12, and facilitate workshops that run the gamut from developing time management techniques to coping with stress, peer pressure, and personal conflicts.

Just as teachers and students are encouraged to be role models, so too are parents. In the school’s

continuing focus on becoming “people of peace,” Sister Katherine points out that parents’ own behavior is crucial in their capacity as “models of peace” for their children. The Parent Organization promotes the school’s values by sponsoring programs to help parents deal with issues that affect the character development of their daughters, such as Internet safety, effective communication, and the dangers of drugs. Parents take pride in working with their daughters on school service projects, particularly on the Super Fair, a carnival that celebrates diverse cultures. Many of the mothers are alumnae themselves and participate in both parent and alumnae get-togethers. This teamwork and intentional modeling of good character by staff, students, and parents serve as powerful forces that enhance SHA education. When Mike Browning, a member of the Board of Directors, asked his daughter why the Academy was so much more effective than other schools, she replied, “If kids were exposed to what we are exposed to, they’d all succeed.”

As Sacred Hearts Academy moves closer to its hundredth birthday, it will continue to expand its service program and to refine its outreach programs that support gender equity. Hawaii can boast of a fine tradition of strong women who have equated leadership with service to their community. Hawaiian congresswoman Patsy Takemoto Mink, the first Asian-American woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives, believed “the highest achievement is to find a place in life that permits one to be of service to people.” The young women of Sacred Hearts Academy are trying their hardest to follow the noble tradition of serving others as a way of building a better tomorrow.

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An SHA senior gives toys and school supplies to an orphan in Vietnam.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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