

Business



Photo: Dr. Kirsten Stein, founder of Athena's Advanced Academy, headquartered in Modesto

Athena's Advanced Academy: Discover. Be Challenged. Learn.

Parents seeking an inspiring online academic environment for their talented and gifted children need look no further than Athena's Advanced Academy (AthenasAcademy.com).

Founded by Dr. Kirsten Stein, and headquartered in Modesto, Athena's provides a diverse array of courses for elementary through high-school level children worldwide.

A Learning Experience

Dr. Kirsten, as she is fondly known by her students, has always wanted to be an

educator. She earned a B.S. in Education and taught elementary school in the public school system, subsequently getting a Masters Education degree, and then her doctoral Ed.D degree in Educational Leadership.

"I knew that I wanted to create a unique learning community. With the growth of online learning, I was inspired to launch Athena's, where we help students to cultivate their love of learning and give parents the peace of mind that their children will be welcomed and challenged," She said.

"I lead a fantastic group of stellar teachers, supportive parents, and

outstanding students. We work together to create a thoughtful, caring, and accepting community."

Athena's has become a wonderful academic environment for parents who homeschool their children, or have their children in the public school system, but are looking for enrichment or a supplement to their school's curriculum. Dr. Kirsten agrees that parents today have many choices in online learning.

"When I began Athena's, online learning was very new and there weren't many online educational opportunities, particularly for gifted students. To better differentiate ourselves, we cater strictly to



talented and gifted students, including those who are twice-exceptional or 2e, a term used for gifted students with a learning difficulty.”

Student Engagement and Communities
Creating a sense of community is a founding principle at Athena’s.

“Quite often, gifted students have trouble finding like-minded peers. As with most people, gifted students want to fit in with others who are like them. It can be difficult to find those peers in their neighborhoods. As an online academy, we reach students from all over the US and Canada, as well as England, Singapore, and even Saudi Arabia. Athena’s brings gifted students together so they can find their group of peers.”

So important is student engagement that several of Athena’s programs have come from student ideas.

“One is our Junior Presenter series. This was created out of our Junior Instructor program, where students with a passion for teaching are given the opportunity to create and teach a class under adult supervision. One student had the desire to create a

class, but she did not meet the age requirement. Because I knew that she wanted to share knowledge, I created our Junior Presenter series in which students share their knowledge in a seminar. The profits from the Junior Presenter seminars go to the charity or non-profit organization of the Junior Presenter’s choice.”

Not Your Everyday Curriculum

Check out the course listings for each semester, and there’s no doubt there are the unusual along with the traditional. “Internet Super Sleuths: Thinking Critically Online,”

“History for Whovians,” “Philosophy, for questioning minds,” and “Searching for Symbolism in Harry Potter” are among the many offerings found at Athena’s.

Dr. Kirsten feels most rewarded by the recognition she receives from her parents and students.

“I recently received an email from a parent who said, ‘Your classes and the fellow students have given my son something to be excited about and helped him feel good about himself. He felt welcome in the virtual classroom, which unfortunately is

not something he often feels. Many of his teachers at his school just want him to be quiet and do the work, and most of his fellow students think he’s a huge nerd for asking so many questions. He loves to learn at Athena’s and your courses make learning so much fun.”

Growing Forward

Learning never stops, not only in the educational arena, but also in running a growing business.

“I’ve been working with consultants at the Valley Sierra Small Business Development Center (SBDC), and they have been an invaluable asset in helping me plan for Athena’s future.”

Dr. Kirsten looks forward to continuing to grow Athena’s and offer her students even more educational opportunities.

“The future is coming at us so fast. We are working with children who are digital natives – they have never known a world without computers. If we are to provide them with the best in educational opportunities, it is our job to stay ahead of the curve.”

STORY BY CLAUDIA NEWCORN

PHOTO PROVIDED BY KIRSTEN STEIN

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