

Black Forest Academy

International Christian education at the crossroads of Europe

New beginnings

On a bright August day last year, approximately eighty 12th Grade students, 'seniors' as they are known around here, lined up with great anticipation outside the school auditorium. Inside, anxious parents were waiting for the procession to begin. As the music began to play, teachers led the way, followed by boarding parents and other staff members. Finally, it was their turn. Their faces filled with excitement and pride, the seniors – carrying the multi-coloured flags of numerous nations – made their way into the auditorium and took their places near the front of the stage. Who are these students and from where do they come? And who are the staff members who come to serve each year as their teachers and boarding caregivers?

A brief history

In 1956, several Canadian missionary families working in Basel, Switzerland, found themselves needing help in educating their children. The children had tried Swiss national schools, but found themselves struggling to learn in their newfound second language. As the mothers of the children attempted to school them at home, they realised that they would need more help. In response to this need, a single Canadian woman arrived from

Canada to support the families in the education of their children. Taking the children under her wing, she educated them from a flat in Basel. This was how the Black Forest Academy began.

Half a century later, BFA is still providing a high-quality Christian English-language education to the international students that walk through its doors each year. The Janz School, as it was first called, continues to meet the educational needs of families as it did back then. As ministry opportunities grew throughout the region and beyond, BFA would also come to meet the needs of more distant families working all over Europe, Asia and Africa through the development of its boarding programme which supports students not just academically, but also socially, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The dorm staff at BFA comprises well-trained caregivers from various countries who aim to be in tune with the unique needs of every student.

Black Forest Academy is a school created by missionaries for missionaries and their children

The mission

I'll never forget my first visit to Kandern, Germany, where the school is located today. In 1996, my wife and I walked the halls of the school for the first time. We were fascinated by the school at that time and are still amazed today how the institution equips students each year, according to its vision statement, to become 'globally-minded Christians changing their world for Christ.'

One would be remiss not to mention that Black Forest Academy is a school created *by* missionaries *for* missionaries and their children. The mission today is still the same as it was back in 1956 – to exist for the cause of missions – the proclamation of the Gospel. This, in turn, necessitated the addition of quality boarding provision that would allow missionary parents to stay in their fields.



Without the boarding programme, BFA would not exist. Today, BFA continues to serve the children of international Christian workers of all sorts: business, medical care, humanitarian relief, seminary professors, music ministry, Scripture translation, church planters, etc. Even with this variety of international workers, the school still has a ratio of 90% missionary kids to 10% business kids.

Missionary kids do not generally benefit from national schools where their parents minister and work. Hence, BFA is able to provide a unique educational environment that brings these 'Third Culture Kids' together with other students of similar experience. In turn this creates a unique kind of learning community that is every bit as stimulating for staff as it is for the students themselves.

Black Forest Academy provides a quality, international Christian education that equips its students to influence their world through biblical thought, character, and action. Parents value the school's core values of truth, excellence and learning. They also communicate their confidence in the strong, biblically based education that BFA provides for their children.

For other missionary and business families already working locally in the area, Black Forest Academy can also provide a viable Christian alternative to national schools as students engage in a rigorous academic and co-curricular programme individually tailored to meet graduation requirements and students' personal interests at the same time.

BFA prepares the majority of its students for study at North American colleges and universities. Yet the school also seeks to provide support and training for other post-secondary opportunities as well. The guidance office works with students on a one-to-one basis to find the unique gifts and talents that each student possesses to prepare them for their future. While the majority of BFA graduates go to the United States and Canada for study, a few select students are able to find post-secondary programmes in Europe that recognise the solid educational foundation built from the years attending BFA.

Academic arena

Black Forest Academy offers the expected core academic subjects such as Bible, Maths, English, History, Science and Foreign Languages, as well as many elective courses available for students to

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Jeff and Kathy Benjamin have four children, two of whom are school age and attending BFA. Jeff and Kathy joined the staff of BFA in 2000.

Over the years Jeff has taught some English and History courses. He is currently serving as principal at Black Forest Academy. Kathy has served in the Discovery Program and as Receptionist in the past.

choose from, including Apologetics, Environmental Science, Journalism, Creative Writing, Graphic Design, Computer Programming, and Industrial Arts just to name a few.

Additionally, BFA provides academic and post-secondary counselling to its students by maintaining a library of college catalogues and by assisting students with college planning. The office also provides the opportunity for students to take standardised tests required by many American colleges including the PSAT and SAT. Numerous Advanced Placement exams are offered as well to help students receive valuable college credit before graduation.

Another aspect of Black Forest Academy's academic emphasis that should not be overlooked is its focus on how faith integrates with classroom learning. Teachers plan their lessons with attention to where God's truth can be found. At BFA teachers and students expect to find God's truth in what they are teaching and learning. From History to Maths to Science, the world, God's workshop, reveals His hand at work. The teachers simply work to bring that into the classroom each period of every day at Black Forest Academy.

The BFA Culture

While many students at BFA are North American passport holders, that certainly does not limit the school to feeling like a normal US or Canadian school. A traditional US curriculum is used to help prepare students for post-secondary study in North America, but multi-cultural elements can be found throughout the school. Korean students gather on Fridays after school with worship services in Korean open to any interested students. National Days of all students are noted on the school calendar. Just



recently, Australia and India's national days as well as the Chinese New Year were all recognised on the same day! But individual cultures aside, BFA students identify with one another as a culture of their own – that of the Third Culture Kid. 'TCKs', as they are referred to, identify not with one culture or another, but to a culture created by students of like experience and interest with whom they come in contact. This is what the third culture is all about.

Certainly integral to the BFA experience for many students is the residential boarding programme. Known at the school as 'ResLife', the residences of the boarding programme seek to build community and ultimately create special identities of their own through traditions, weekly dorm fellowship times, and special birthday customs.

Dorm parents and residence assistants nurture and mentor the students. These caring, experienced adults perform all of the housekeeping duties in order to provide the best care that they can for the young people in their care.

BFA is still providing a high-quality Christian English-language education

The faculty and staff who come to teach at BFA each year come supported by family, friends, and churches. Both staff and students adhere to a passion for excellence, giving their best in all they do. Working together as teams in the classrooms, students often comment on the strong relationships shared with their teachers.

Beyond academics

While Bible classes and weekly student chapels play an important role in spiritual transformation at BFA, it doesn't stop there. It is the school's goal that every student participates in a weekly small group for accountability, growth and support. Students are expected to attend weekly church services on campus or with their families in other community churches. Students are also encouraged to take part in a variety of ministry outreach opportunities. Musical ensembles, and sign language and drama teams perform in churches, retirement homes, and on the streets of local towns



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and cities. A number of BFA's senior students become leaders themselves each week by serving our middle school in a weekly youth group evening.

Annual spring break mission trips further emphasise the focus BFA puts on supporting missionary work around the world. Many students, coming from missionary families themselves, take advantage of the opportunity to learn what it means to serve others in this way. Quality music and athletic programmes also give students the opportunity to reach beyond the walls of the school and to interact with other students through performance and competition.

Future focus

Those inquiring about Black Forest Academy often ask about the vision that is held for the future. While continuing to provide the same quality education remains part of that future vision, there is a recent nuance. An opportunity to enter into bilingual education has just posed itself in the last year. A local Christian national school has approached BFA to partner it in providing a new bilingual learning opportunity beginning with Grade 1. There are many hurdles and challenges still ahead, but there is much enthusiasm to start this new school in the autumn/fall of 2009.

While recent economic events and a weaker US dollar provide additional challenges for the school, the future still looks bright as we stay the course and hold fast to our biblical purposes. Please pray for us as we continue to partner the parents of our students in helping them to accomplish their own ministry goals and objectives.

Each year BFA seeks qualified staff to work with its students in a wide range of positions. If you would consider making a difference through such a ministry, please don't hesitate to contact the BFA personnel office at personnel@bfacademy.com. To find out about anticipated openings for next year, please visit us online at www.bfacademy.com.

■ Jeff Benjamin