

= United States Academic Decathlon =

The Academic Decathlon (also called AcaDec , AcaDeca or AcDec) is the only annual high school academic competition organized by the non @-@ profit United States Academic Decathlon Association (USAD) . The competition consists of seven multiple choice tests , two performance events , and an essay . Academic Decathlon was created by Robert Peterson in 1968 for local schools in Orange County , California and expanded nationwide in 1981 . That year , 17 states and the District of Columbia participated , a number that has grown to include most of the United States and some international schools . In 2015 Academic Decathlon held its first ever International competition in Shanghai , China . Once known as United States Academic Decathlon , on March 1 , 2013 , it began operating as the Academic Decathlon .

Academic Decathlon is designed to include students from all achievement levels . Teams generally consist of nine members , who are divided into three divisions based on grade point average : Honors (3 @. @ 75 ? 4 @. @ 00 GPA) , Scholastic (3 @. @ 00 ? 3 @. @ 74 GPA) , and Varsity (0 @. @ 00 ? 2 @. @ 99 GPA) . Each team member competes in all ten events against other students in his or her division , and team scores are calculated using the top two overall individual scores from each team in all three divisions . Gold , silver , and bronze medals are awarded for individual events and for overall scores . To earn a spot at the national competition in April , teams must advance through local , regional , and state competitions , though some levels of competition may be bypassed for smaller states . Online competitions , separated into small , medium , and large categories , are also offered . USAD has expanded to include an International Academic Decathlon and has created an Academic Pentathlon for middle schools .

The ten events require knowledge in many academic disciplines . Students must take seven multiple choice tests in art , economics , language and literature , math , music , science and social science . These topics , with the exception of math , are thematically linked each year . One of the multiple choice events , alternating between science or social science , is chosen for the Super Quiz . In addition to the seven objective events , there are three subjective events graded by judges : essay , interview and speech .

Over the years , there have been various small controversies , the most infamous being the scandal involving the Steinmetz High School team , which was caught cheating at the 1995 Illinois state finals . This event was later dramatized in the 2000 film *Cheaters* . Academic Decathlon has been criticized by educators for the amount of time it requires students to spend on the material , as it constitutes an entire curriculum beyond the one provided by the school . Around the turn of the millennium , several coaches protested the USAD 's decision to publish error @-@ ridden Resource Guides rather than provide topics for students to research .

= = History = =

Academic Decathlon was founded in 1968 by Robert Peterson , the superintendent of schools in Orange County , California . Marvin Cobb , the executive director of the California Academic Decathlon in 2003 , said after Peterson 's death that Peterson intended the competition to encourage not only the highest @-@ level students who already competed in academic competitions (" [adding] a little glory , " as President of the Orange County Academic Decathlon Association put it in 1970) , but also to " change C students ' lives " . The inaugural competition , held in December 1968 , hosted 103 students from 20 local high schools . At first only regional contests were held , organized by the Orange County Academic Decathlon Corporation (OCAD) with the assistance of the Orange County Department of Education . In 1971 , when the grand jury recommended that the Orange County Department of Education should no longer play a part in the competition , full control was handed over to the OCAD .

In 1979 , the first statewide competition was held , and just over two years later , the newly formed United States Academic Decathlon Association held the first national competition in April 1982 at Loyola Marymount University in California ? 200 high schools from 16 states and the District of Columbia competed for the chance to attend . Peterson , inspired by the 1984 Summer Olympics in

Los Angeles , hoped to make Academic Decathlon an international event . At the 1984 Nationals , 32 states as well as Canada , Mexico , New Zealand and South Korea fielded teams . The inclusion of foreign countries did not become a regular occurrence , however . There was no more international participation until 1989 , when teams from Northern Ireland and Rio de Janeiro competed . Since then , only a handful of international schools have competed .

After a 1986 trial competition , Dr. Peterson founded a " International Decathlon for Academics " in 1990 . Competitions were held in 1990 , 1991 and 1992 , but for a number of reasons the competition did not continue . In April 2009 , USAD announced that it would be regularly hosting an online international competition , the International Academic Decathlon , after a successful trial event in 2008 ; however , all 2009 participants but Southbank opted out , leading USAD to issue Southbank an invitation to attend the 2009 U.S. National Competition instead .

Academic Decathlon was originally organized differently than the current competition . The original ten events were aesthetics (music and visual arts) , conversation , essay writing , mathematics , practical arts , formal speech , physical science , social science , current events , extracurricular activities , and English literature , grammar , and reading . Over time , those events evolved into : economics , essay , fine arts , interview , language and literature , math , science , social sciences , speech and Super Quiz . It was not until 1998 that fine arts was split into its two constituent tests : art and music . Due to this division , the Super Quiz took the place of one of the other subjects each year . In 1998 , Super Quiz replaced economics ; from 1999 until 2012 , it replaced either science or social science and alternated replacing the two from 2003 to 2012 . Beginning with the 2013 season , the Super Quiz consisted of a relay portion only , encompassing questions from the respective year 's Science , Language and Literature , Music , Social Science , Art , and Economics curriculum .

More than just the events were changed during the 1998 ? 99 season ? the style of study required of students changed . Prior to that season , students had performed their own research for each event , and test writers did not have to base their questions on material USAD published . However , after a policy change at the beginning of the 1999 ? 2000 competition year , test writers were required to base the tests on official USAD materials . After the change in policy , scores vastly increased across the country . That year at Nationals , James E. Taylor High School had the highest team score yet seen at the competition . The following season , USAD once again altered their testing policies ; 50 % of test questions were to come from USAD published " Resource Guides " and 50 % were to come from unspecified sources . Economics focused on business organizations and profiles in individual enterprise rather than macroeconomics and microeconomics as it had for the previous 19 years . A decrease in scores followed these changes ; the national winner that year , El Camino Real High School , scored 5 @,@ 923 fewer points than James E. Taylor High School had the previous year . The following year , USAD settled on an organization of test materials that it would use for almost a full decade , with a mixture of questions from the provided material and independent research . A number of curriculum changes were reversed .

Though the events finally stabilized during the 2000 ? 01 season , the USAD administration changed dramatically that year when the program 's executive director , James Alvino , resigned . Alvino had written a religious article that had been included in that year 's Super Quiz Resource Guide . His critics and the USAD Board regarded the inclusion as a conflict of interest , as the material was a persuasive essay that heavily pushed Alvino 's point of view . The season was also significant in that it was the first year that states were allowed to send both their large and small school champions to the national competition . (Small schools are currently classified as those schools with fewer than 650 students .) However , this practice was short @-@ lived and was discontinued after the 2002 season . Instead , a small school e @-@ Nationals was introduced during the 2005 ? 06 school year . The medium school e @-@ Nationals was established two years later for those schools with between 650 and 1 @,@ 300 students . In 2010 , California Academic Decathlon announced that a large school e @-@ Nationals would be held for the second @-@ highest performing school in each state .

In 2009 , USAD announced the launch of an " Online Middle School Pentathlon Program " , a competition similar to Academic Decathlon , with only essay , language and literature , mathematics , geography or social science , and science as events . Either science or social science would be

designated as the Super Quiz topic .

In 2010 , it was announced that high school students who don 't have access to a school team or whose team has been eliminated in an earlier round can participate in an online individual competition .

= = Participation = =

= = = Team makeup and eligibility = = =

The USAD requires a diversity of achievement within each team ; teams must have students who fall into three categories determined by GPA . The Honors category is composed of students with GPAs between 3 @. @ 75 and 4 @. @ 0 . The Scholastic category consists of students with GPAs between 3 @. @ 0 and 3 @. @ 74 . The final group , the Varsity category , contains students whose GPA ranges from 0 @. @ 00 to 2 @. @ 99 . USAD uses a modified GPA scale in which performance @- @ based classes such as music , art or physical education are omitted from the GPA calculation . A grade counts for face value regardless of whether it is from an advanced placement , honors , regular or remedial class . An A is counted as a 4 @. @ 0 , a B as a 3 @. @ 0 , a C as a 2 @. @ 0 , a D as a 1 @. @ 0 , and a F as a 0 . Only final grades taken from the previous two complete school years are used to calculate GPA .

A team typically consists of nine competitors : three honors , three scholastic and three varsity . However , since only the top two scores from each category count towards the team 's total score , a team can compete with as few as six students without any point deduction . Students may compete in a higher category than the one they are assigned to , but generally it is to the students ' advantage to compete in the lowest category they can . Scores in Varsity are typically lower than those in Scholastic , and those in Scholastic are typically lower than those in Honors .

= = = Levels of competition = = =

There are four official levels of competition : local / scrimmage , regional , state , and national (Rounds 1 , 2 , 3 , and 4 respectively) . With the exception of Round 1 , only the top finishers in each round advance to the next level . California , the state with the largest Academic Decathlon , holds local scrimmages using the Round 1 tests , which are largely for practice and do not determine whether a team can compete at the regional level , which uses Round 2 tests . In the 2008 ? 09 season , 43 states participated in statewide Academic Decathlons , though only 35 and an international school participated in the national competition .

= = Events = =

Like an athletic decathlon , the Academic Decathlon has ten events : art , economics , essay , interview , language and literature , math , music , science , social science , and speech . Prior to 2013 , the Super Quiz replaced one of the seven objective events each year ; from 2003 @- @ 2012 , it alternated between replacing science and social science . USAD releases the topics and theme of the following year 's competition in early March , giving students time to prepare for a competition season that runs from November to April . The curriculum is developed by a ten @- @ member panel of former USAD coaches known as the USAD Curriculum Advisory Group . The group contracts with " curriculum developers " , who must have at least a bachelor 's degree in their respective subject , to create the subject area outlines , Resource Guides , and Notebook Dividers . The Super Quiz Resource Guide was formed mostly from articles from peer reviewed journals , but also includes non @- @ peer reviewed articles , which are looked over by a panel of five reviewers and then checked for accuracy by another reviewer . Use of this format was continued for the Science packet in the 2012 @- @ 2013 season .

The events are split up into two groups : the seven objective tests (art , economics , language and

literature , math , music , science and social science) the three subjective events (essay , interview and speech) . In addition , there is a SuperQuiz relay event . The former seven are given as half @-@ hour multiple choice tests , whereas the latter three are graded by judges . The multiple choice exams consist of 50 questions each , with the exception of math , which has 35 questions . Beginning in the 2012 @-@ 2013 season , the SuperQuiz written test was dropped and the oral relay was changed to include questions from six of the objective subjects : art , economics , language and literature , music , science , and social science .

= = = Objective events = = =

In general , the objective events follow a set organizational outline from year to year . Language and literature focuses on a single novel or a set of plays in addition to multiple short literary selections which tend to be poems or excerpts from short stories . The art and music sections include several selections with which students must familiarize themselves in addition to historical information . Economics remains fairly static ; 85 % of the material focuses on a standard course of macroeconomics and microeconomics and the remaining 15 % focuses on the year 's topic . For example , in 2005 the themed material covered the economics of ancient Egypt and Rome . Science and social science reflect the season 's theme . Unlike the other events , there is no basic information that carries over . The math curriculum has varied as well , occasionally dropping and adding new subjects or shifting the weight of particular subjects .

= = = Super Quiz = = =

The format of the Super Quiz differs from that of the other subject areas . Added in 1969 , it offers a culminating championship event . The Super Quiz consisted of a forty @-@ question multiple choice test as well as a relay round until 2013 . In 2013 , the multiple @-@ choice portion was eliminated and the relay portion expanded to include six of the objective subjects . Generally referred to as the Super Quiz Relay , it is the only event viewable by the general public . The relay starts with the Varsity students , followed by the Scholastic and the Honors students . Each group is given 10 or 15 questions , depending on the format decided by the state coordinator . These questions are read aloud to the audience and are printed or projected for the competitors . After the questions and answers are read , the students are allowed seven seconds to select the correct answer . The answer is checked on the spot by a judge and scores are immediately displayed to the audience .

= = = Subjective events = = =

The subjective events allow students more creativity than the objective events . The speech event is divided into prepared and impromptu sections . A three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half to four @-@ minute long prepared speech is delivered . The student is then given one minute to read three prompts and deliver a one @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half to two @-@ minute impromptu speech . Example prompts have included : " It has been said about our modern times that , ' Invention is the mother of necessity . ' Please discuss . " , " Math has been described as the universal language . Discuss . " and " Why is light , light and dark , dark ? " In the interview , the students are asked a wide variety of questions in a formal environment . Questions range from : " Who is your role model ? " to " How would you alert someone that their zipper is down ? " In both the speech and interview , the competitor is not allowed to reveal his or her school or hometown to ensure neutrality by the judges . In the essay event , students are given 50 minutes to write an essay responding to one of three prompts derived from the language and literature or the Super Quiz curriculum .

= = = Themes and topics = = =

As the competition has evolved , more of the events have been tied into a central theme . For example , the 2008 ? 2009 theme was " Latin America with a focus on Mexico " . Language and

literature was based on six short selections of literature as well as the novel *Bless Me* , *Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya . Art focused on the art of Mexico and featured several pieces of work , ranging from Olmec earthenware to José Guadalupe Posada 's *La Calavera Catrina* . The music event included questions on Latin American music and included works by musicians as varied as Manuel de Zumaya , Silvestre Revueltas , Ástor Piazzolla and Xavier Cugat . Social science and economics focused on the history and economy of Mexico respectively . The Super Quiz covered an introduction to evolutionary biology , the historical development of the theory of evolution , natural selection , speciation , mutation , gene flow , genetic drift , and evolutionary developmental biology . Information was also included on Charles Darwin 's voyage on the HMS Beagle .

= = Study materials = =

The United States Academic Decathlon publishes a variety of study materials for the objective events , the profits from which support the program . The Resource Guides and the Basic Guides constitute the majority of the USAD corpus . An art reproduction booklet and music CD contain a particular year 's relevant pieces and are issued separately from the Resource Guides . Study guides are also published and contain detailed topical outlines for each objective subject . These outlines specifically indicate which topics will require independent research beyond the material included in the Resource Guides . USAD also offered Research Guides until 2010 , which outlined the basics of what students ought to research . However , in the 2010 ? 2011 competition season , USAD announced that it would be eliminating independent research @-@ based questions from the competitions .

Resource Guides are offered for the art , economics , language and literature , music , science / social science , and Super Quiz events . The Super Quiz Resource Guide is a compendium of previously published articles , whereas the other Resource Guides are composed by individual writers under contract with USAD . The aim of the Resource Guide is to assist students in their study of the topics listed in the subject area outlines . As an example , in 2003 the music topic was Romantic music . Subsequently the Music Resource Guide focused on the development of Romantic music , its characteristics and the influence of the Classical era on the Romantic era . A large part of the guide focused on information about that year 's composers : Beethoven , Berlioz , Rossini , Chopin , Mendelssohn , Verdi , Mussorgsky , Wagner , Bizet , Brahms , Tchaikovsky , Mahler and Strauss . Similarly , the art topic assigned was Romantic art in the European tradition . The Art Resource Guide included sections detailing the lives and works of relevant artists such as Joseph Mallord William Turner , Claude Monet , Albert Bierstadt , and Camille Pissarro .

In the 1990s , various companies were established to research subjects and provide practice tests to teams . Two of the major ones were Acalon Cards and Exams and DemiDec , formed by former coach Dan Spetner and former Decathlete Daniel Berdichevsky , respectively . The two offer exams and study guides that can augment or replace USAD 's official materials . USAD explicitly discouraged teams from ordering materials from third @-@ party companies in the late 1998 , though it later removed their discouragement from the curriculum page . USAD republished their discouragement just a few weeks after removing it , but did not publish such a warning in 2002 .

In 2000 , several coaches who had led their teams to Nationals during the 1990s resigned in protest over Academic Decathlon 's decision to sell nearly \$ 1 @,@ 000 of study materials rather than simply providing topics for students to independently research . Teams felt obligated to buy the guides because USAD based the official tests on them . Teams also denounced the hundreds of errors they found in the official guides ; coaches were sometimes forced to instruct their students to deliberately give the wrong answer in the official competition . Richard Golenko , coach of the 1996 J. Frank Dobie High School team that won the national competition , said that the decision to market guides shifted Academic Decathlon 's emphasis to memorization over critical thinking . Coach Jim Hatem of Los Angeles and Coach Mark Johnson of El Camino 's 1998 winning team fumed over esoteric " trick " questions that USAD had begun asking . James Alvino , USAD 's executive director at that time , argued that the expensive study materials were necessary to continue funding nearly 75 % of the program 's \$ 1 @,@ 750 @,@ 000 operating budget and to provide a fairer playing field

for less wealthy schools , but did acknowledge that USAD would attempt to reduce prices , remove the more trivial questions , and base smaller portions of the tests on the official Resource Guide .

Basic Guides were formerly issued for students which , unlike the Resource Guides , remained the same from year to year . The Art Basic Guide focuses on art fundamentals , such as the elements of art , principles of composition , and different 2 @-@ D and 3 @-@ D techniques . Additionally , a brief introduction to art history is included . The Economics Basic Guide reviews fundamental economic concepts in addition to the basics of macroeconomics and microeconomics . The Language and Literature Basic Guide provides students with a basic grounding in the analysis of literature and introduces key terms such as synecdoche , metonymy , assonance , and aphorism . The Math Basic Guide offers a general overview of major topics in high school math , including algebra , geometry , trigonometry , calculus , and statistics . The Music Basic Guide begins by introducing the student to topics in music theory such as harmonics , rhythm , tempo , and the circle of fifths . It also includes information on a wide variety of instruments and a brief history of Western music . However , beginning in the 2010 ? 2011 competition season , the Basic Guides were incorporated into the year 's Resource Guides .

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has criticized the intense amount of studying required by students as " excess fact @-@ mongering " . In the 1980s , the Association did not endorse Academic Decathlon , citing what it believes was an excessive amount of time involved with the studying necessary to win . It stated that while it is not opposed to the academic portion of the competition , it disliked the " national dimension " of it . However , beginning in 2008 , the Association placed USAD on their " National Advisory List of Student Contests and Activities " . The list consists of programs that a NASSP committee believes meets their requisite quality standards .

= = Scoring and winning = =

Each of the ten events is worth 1 @,@ 000 points , for a possible 10 @,@ 000 @-@ point individual total . Only the top two scores from the Honors , Scholastic and Varsity divisions are counted for the team score . Until 2013 , 60 @,@ 000 was the maximum possible team score . In 2013 , Super Quiz became a 10 @,@ 000 point event that only counts for the team score , making the maximum possible team score 70 @,@ 000 . With the exception of math and Super Quiz , the objective tests each have 50 questions worth 20 points a piece . The math test is weighted more heavily , with 35 questions worth approximately 28 @.@ 6 points per question . Until 2013 , the Super Quiz written test contained 40 questions , each worth 15 points . Depending on the state director , the relay component of Super Quiz contained either 5 or 10 questions , each worth 80 or 40 points respectively . Starting in 2013 , the Super Quiz contained only the relay component with 5 or 10 questions , each worth approximately 333 @.@ 3 or 166 @.@ 7 questions respectively . The written test was sometimes omitted at the state level even before 2013 if a state director wished to weigh the Super Quiz Relay more heavily . Perfect scores of 1 @,@ 000 in events are recorded regularly , and there have been cases of dozens of medal winners for a single event because of perfect and near @-@ perfect scores . Gold , silver and bronze medals are awarded in each event and for each division (Honors , Scholastic , and Varsity) . All tying participants are awarded medals .

The medals ' design is the " AD " portion of the official USAD logo , encircled by " United States " at the top , " Academic Decathlon " at the bottom , and four stars of increasing size on either side . Though the medals are given out only to winners of the competitions , teams can order them along with other study materials . The medals given at state and local competitions are of a different design than those given at Nationals .

The interview and speech events are graded by two to three judges . The scores from the judges are averaged to give a maximum of 1 @,@ 000 points per event . The essay is graded with a rubric and is read by two different judges whose scores are then averaged . If the difference between the judges ' scores differs by 200 points or more , then a third reader is asked to grade the student 's essay . The two scores that are closest in value are averaged to give the final score .

A benchmark for the Decathlon elite is obtaining an individual score of over 900 points . It was not until 1992 , 24 years after the program 's inception , that Tyson Rogers achieved this feat at the national competition . Since then , numerous students have broken the 900 point barrier . The current highest individual score is 946 , achieved by Kris Sankaran from Moorpark High School at the 2009 California state competition . State champion scores vary greatly from year to year . As an example , for the 2002 - 03 season , scores ranged from 785 to 910 points . National champion scores have been as low as 857 points and as high as 981 points . The 981 score produced by the 2012 Granada Hills Charter High School team at the National Championship stands as the record for the highest team score .

== Controversies ==

Three days before the 1995 Illinois state competition , Steinmetz High School obtained copies of the tests from the DeVry Institute of Technology , where the state finals were being held . The team was therefore able to look up and memorize the answers . The cheating allowed Steinmetz to beat perennial powerhouse Whitney Young Magnet High School , who had won the Illinois state finals in 22 of the previous 23 years . Six of the twelve students in the nation who scored over 900 points on the math test came from Steinmetz High School , prompting the Illinois state Academic Decathlon to suspect cheating . The Steinmetz team was disqualified after team members refused to take an alternate version of the test , and its coach eventually resigned . The incident was dramatized in the movie Cheaters .

Catholic Memorial High School coach John Burke was at the center of a dispute over the results of the 2003 Wisconsin state final . Confusion arose over a Catholic Memorial student 's essay after the results of the competition were released . The essay had only received 390 points out of a possible 1000 , and Burke contended that it had been scored improperly . He was well within his rights to contest the score ; however , Gerhard Fischer , President of Wisconsin Academic Decathlon , said that the way Burke handled the appeal was " highly questionable " and inflammatory . Though Burke was reprimanded , parents of Catholic Memorial students believed the punishment , a three - year suspension for Burke and a one - year suspension for Catholic Memorial , was due to personality differences between Burke and Wisconsin Academic Decathlon officials . The controversy eventually led to a more thorough investigation of previous issues involving Burke . The Wisconsin Academic Decathlon Board discovered that Burke had previously been accused of " more than a year of repeated ' attacks ' on another school 's pupils , including allegations of cheating on tests and ineligibility . "

== National championship ==

The National Championship pits the winning school from each state against all the others for an overall title . Occasionally , a number of international schools compete as well . Schools compete based on size and are divided into three divisions (I , II , and III) . However , this separation is limited to overall team score and overall individual score . Nine overall team medals are awarded : gold , silver and bronze for each division . Similarly , 27 overall individual medals are awarded : gold , silver and bronze for Honors , Scholastic and Varsity in each division . The top prepared speeches are honored at the Speech Showcase , while the rest of the medals ? for example , gold in art for Honors , or silver in math for Varsity ? are awarded to the top scoring persons during the awards banquet regardless of division . Other awards given out include the Kristin Caperton Award for overcoming personal or physical challenges , among others . Certain awards occasionally come with monetary prizes ; these often vary from year to year . Since the first national event in 1982 , all National Championship winners have come from three states : California , Texas and Wisconsin .

== Virtual competition ==

In 2006 , the small school virtual competition was created for schools with 650 or fewer students . Two years later , the medium school virtual competition was added to accommodate schools with a student population between 650 and 1 @, @ 300 . These two separate contests are held via the Internet and , as such , the interview and speech events are excluded . The remaining eight tests are completed on the computer and results are submitted electronically to USAD for scoring . Because only the seven multiple choice tests and essay are used , team scores are out of 48 @, @ 000 points instead of 60 @, @ 000 . Although it is only a virtual competition , winning schools are awarded trophies and medals for their efforts . University High School , from Fresno , California , has won 6 of 7 Small School National Championships . Coached by Sean Canfield , the team has won both the California and National Small School titles for the past 6 years . UHS has a current enrollment of 465 students , yet placed 8th overall at the 2013 California State , competing against schools several times its size . According to USAD , the goal of the small and medium school competitions is to " enhance learning , growth and recognition " . In 2010 , the United States Academic Decathlon announced the beginning of a large school e @-@ Nationals for the second @-@ highest performing large school in each state .