



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Students go to the Front of the Class with Harkness Table

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When the Harkness Table arrived at Auldern Academy last year, it was placed in the classroom where history instruction takes place. "Teaching around the table has become a tremendous interactive experience. I have noticed that classroom debate has increased," stated Chris Will who teaches World and US History, Economics, and Government. He described lively discussions that he attributes to the fact that students face each other in the classroom, "which is far more engaging than the days when one could sit in the back of the class and hide out. Those days are gone." In recounting his efforts to challenge students academically, Mr. Will stated, "As I walk around the table, it is easier to engage all students in discussion that provides them with a much different classroom experience." Teaching with a Harkness table has historic roots.

Developed at Phillips Exeter Academy, the method's name comes from the oil magnate and philanthropist Edward Harkness, a graduate of St. Paul's School (Concord, NH) who presented the school with a monetary gift in 1930.

He described its use as follows:

What I have in mind is a classroom where students could sit around a table with a teacher who would talk with them and instruct them by a sort of tutorial or conference method, where [each student] would feel encouraged to speak up. This would be a real revolution in methods.

The notion of bringing the Harkness table to Auldern Academy was initiated by Bill Grant, Assistant Head of School at Auldern Academy. He desired to "bring the classrooms to state of the art." Bill came from traditional boarding schools and thought that a therapeutic school such as Auldern truly needed to "look and feel" more like a traditional school. His goal is to enhance our excellent education with state of the art equipment. Thus, he introduced us to the "Harkness table."

Bill's dream came true last fall with the generous support of a father of one of our students, Jimmy Smith. Mr. Smith, a history major in college, demonstrated his appreciation for all that Auldern had done for his daughter, both academically and emotionally. The Harkness table was special gift in honor of his daughter Amy, who graduated in December 2008 from Auldern Academy.



On November 3, 2008, we held a dedication of the Social Studies room, which is now named the "Smith History Room". Jimmy had the room completely outfitted with a new Harkness table and the 14 chairs, flat screened TV, DVD player, laptop and LCD media projector and screen. Jimmy came to campus to meet the girls and to see the newly outfitted room.

“In the Smith History Room, we can sit side by side. The questions seem to rise to the surface a little easier, according to Mr. Will. “We heartened as we hear students finding their voice around the table.” The staff and students of Auldern are greatly appreciative of Mr. Smith for his generous donation and for providing a new forum for learning. He has given the academy a gift that will be used by many generations of Auldern students.

Bill Grant continues to work with parents who are generously providing needed equipment for all classrooms. His goal is to have every classroom to the “state of the art” level within the next school year.

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