



COVENANT
CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Academics at Covenant

By

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What is Classical Education?

By our very nature as a school, Covenant's chief task is to provide students with an excellent education—a classical and Christian education. Classical education defies simple definition or reduction to a formula and finds various expressions at different schools. Covenant's leadership foresaw the need to articulate what classical education entails at our school in hopes that our school community would not be tempted to oversimplify or to stray from our vision. The following paragraph from our Mission Statement answers, "What do we mean by Classical Education?"

Classical education belongs to the authoritative, traditional and enduring stream of education begun by the Greeks and Romans, developed by the Church through the centuries and renewed by contemporary educators. Infused with the liberal arts and sciences, classical education includes the language arts of the trivium (grammar, logic and rhetoric) and the quantitative arts of the quadrivium (mathematics, science, music and visual arts). Students study great works of art and literature, both old and new, by methods best suited to their developmental stages. As participants in the great conversation of history's finest thinkers, students acquire more than vocational skills; they prepare for their roles as informed citizens, thinking Christians and virtuous shapers of culture.

—Mission Statement and Core Values

Let's take each section of this skeletal definition and add flesh...

...the authoritative, traditional and enduring stream of education begun by the Greeks and Romans, developed by the Church through the centuries and renewed by contemporary educators..

A Renewal of Traditional and Historical Education: Raising a Child for the Kingdom

This is our heritage, something that comes to us from those who have gone before us. We acknowledge that by God's common grace the pagan Greeks and Romans had insight into how to educate children. The Greek word *paideia* labeled this all-encompassing task of raising full-blown citizens. This *paideia*, or "childing", was not just about the mind; the whole person was being developed as an adult citizen. What the Greeks and Romans sought but never found was the glue that held all of this education together; they never found the capstone for the temple they were building. Scripture tells us that in the "fullness of time" Christ entered the world; our brothers and sisters in Christ who lived in this Greek and Roman world possessed what the pagans lacked—Christ in whom all things held together. Paul exhorts fathers in Ephesians 6:4 to bring up their children in the "*paideia* of the Lord"—an all encompassing task of raising up mature citizens of God's Kingdom. Through the next centuries the Church combined the common grace insights of the pagans and the supremacy of Christ to develop effective educational systems. Although not lost in all settings, these excellent educational practices—and the Christian purposes—were largely abandoned in American progressive education over the last century, until about thirty years ago when schools like Covenant began paying attention once again to this heritage.

As we look to those who have gone before us for guidance we, in a sense, show respect for our elders—and we give them a vote in what we do. Looking to the past does not preclude looking around us at current best practices. But, unlike most

**Respecting
Our Elders
and
Educating
the “Free”**

contemporary educational ventures, we do not assume that all the educational wisdom comes from our current decade.

As a school working to educate students in ways that incorporate wisdom from the past, Covenant faces a tough task. We are implementing something that most of us did not experience in our own educations. We have few role models, so we must read books, attend conferences and visit other schools as we seek to implement our educational philosophy. Without intentional pursuit of this heritage, we will slip back to what we know from our own experiences—something far from classical education. Adopting the label of classical is easy; living it out is hard work.

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A classical education at Covenant is broad and is full of studies that aim at maximizing our students’ humanity by developing many aspects of them as persons—their intellects, emotions, spirits, bodies and passions. This broad education is rooted in the traditional liberal arts, the education of the “free” man that prepared him to pursue a host of professions. This liberal education contrasted with training in the servile arts that prepared a student for work in a trade. The liberally educated student is ready to study philosophy and, most importantly for the Christian, theology. Once again, our Christian forerunners brought the missing capstone to education; the study of all things prepared a person for the study of God. In this broad and full view of education, the growth and the ordering of the inner person is given priority over training students in tasks.

**The Liberal
Arts and the
Imitation of
the True,
Good and
Beautiful**

The language arts of the *Trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric) concern the use of words in ways that are correct, persuasive and beautiful. As people of the Word, we believe that skillful use of words—whether Latin, Spanish or English—ought to characterize the Christian. The quantitative arts of the *Quadrivium* include subjects that are inspired by the muses and by the natural world, giving students a sense of numbers, space, heritage and creativity. Mathematics, Science, Music and Art reside under the *Quadrivium* umbrella. All seven liberal arts find expression in History and Literature, which acquaint students with the great ideas that have enriched human culture and give them an understanding of who we are as people, what we have been and what we might become.

...Students study great works of art and literature, both old and new, by methods best suited to their developmental stages...

The Covenant curriculum is not bound by time—we do not judge a book by its publication date but rather by its truthfulness, its goodness and its beauty. Our students meet both ancient and contemporary authors, artists and ideas and seek to imitate their best aspects. They gain experience in sorting out the true from the false, learning that non-believers throughout history have contributed valuable truth to human knowledge because of God’s common grace. They also learn that not everything written or created by Christians is either truthful or beautiful.

Classical Teaching and the Training of Culture-Shapers

Teachers at Covenant give attention to the nature of children at different ages. Younger students are given concrete experiences to which they can relate the concepts and facts that they memorize in songs and chants. Older students learn through “talking it out” in discussions and debates and through constructing speeches and papers on a variety of topics. These teaching methods—singing, chanting, discussing, debating, writing and speaking—are intentionally chosen as tools that fill a student’s “learning toolbox”. Mature learners need to possess many strategies to learn new material and are able to choose the appropriate tool for learning particular types of information, so we give our students a lot of practice using their tools.

...As participants in the great conversation of history's finest thinkers, students acquire more than vocational skills; they prepare for their roles as informed citizens, thinking Christians and virtuous shapers of culture.

We have goals for our students but not simply goals of college admittance and economic success. We want them to leave Covenant prepared to serve God effectively by being “in the world but not of the world.” We do not believe that every student is destined to leadership in society, but we do believe that all students should be prepared to engage those around them in influential ways and to discern error—no matter what their life roles. Thus, while some may lead society in notable ways, all students should engage and shape culture within the sphere to which God calls them.

Passion and Discipline

Covenant’s goals encompass so much more than filling students’ minds with information. Teachers are called to inspire students in their learning and to train them in the disciplines that are necessary for fruitful, life-long learning. As both passion and disciplined habits are necessary for a healthy spiritual life, they are necessary for a healthy intellectual life.

Academics without passion are dry and lifeless, but misguided passion leads to the wasting of one’s life. Covenant teachers are called to be passion-shapers by helping students come to love what is best to love. The best is not always the easiest, though, so teachers must help students move from “milk to meat” in their academic lives. This is best done not by entertainment, which engages without growth, but by inspiration, which encourages students to stretch their minds to meet moderate challenges. This incremental growth adds up, and adults are often surprised at what young students can do in this environment. Anyone who thinks that *The Hobbit* is too hard for children has never been to our fourth grade! Students come to acquire a taste for the best things as they are invited by the adults around them to partake.

Just as one cannot be a star athlete on passion alone, a student cannot fully develop in academics without the consistent application of skills and habits that support his passion. Teachers at Covenant know that helping students to form disciplined habits such as attentiveness, diligence and self-control will equip them to meet future challenge with confidence.

**The Potent
Blend of
School,
Family and
Church**

Because this fully developed learner is shaped by so much more than textbooks, lessons and tests, attention must be paid to the whole environment of the child. The school cannot do this task alone; the home must also embody this mix of passion and discipline. Students whose lives are filled with adults for whom thinking and learning are important and who model careful evaluation of the philosophies of the day have much advantage over those for whom school is the only place of learning. Thus, academics at Covenant do not stand isolated from ongoing education at home or formative learning at Church. Our students need all three.