



COVENANT

CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Academics at Covenant

By

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Covenant's Academic Dean from 1997-2014

With Appendices:

Covenant's Classical Method: An Overview

The Excellent Student



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

Respecting Our Elders and Educating the “Free”

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

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

Classical Teaching and the Training of Culture-Shapers

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 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.

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 use many strategies to learn new material and are able to choose the appropriate tool for learning particular types of information, so our students are given 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.

Passion and Discipline

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.

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.



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Covenant’s Classical Method: An Overview

At Covenant Christian Academy, our plan of education is based on an ancient method of teaching known as the “Trivium.” The Trivium divides the student’s school career into three major sections according to the natural development of children.

1. **Grammar period** (Grades K-6). At this stage children love to chant, recite, memorize, sing--any lively activity that also serves to enhance retention of information. Every subject area has its own “grammar,” the foundation for all future learning.
2. **Dialectic period.** Students at this stage love to argue! So we teach them how to do it well and with respect and clarity. Formal logic is taught, both as a specific subject and in conjunction with other subjects. Debate is encouraged and students are taught to carefully evaluate all they see and hear.
3. **Rhetoric period.** High school students are eager to express themselves, and the development of eloquence is the primary target of this stage. Information and techniques from the preceding stages are integrated with more advanced study. Covenant students must defend an original thesis in a public forum in order to graduate.

Beginning Grammar	GRAMMAR	LOGIC	RHETORIC
Grades K-2	Grades 3-6	Grades 7-9	Grades 10-12
Approx. ages 4-8	Approx. ages 9-11	Approx. ages 12-14	Approx. ages 15-18
<i>Student Characteristics:</i>	<i>Student Characteristics:</i>	<i>Student Characteristics:</i>	<i>Student Characteristics:</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obviously excited about learning 2. Enjoys games, stories, songs, projects 3. Short attention span 4. Wants to touch, taste, feel, smell, see 5. Imaginative, creative 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Excited about new, interesting facts 2. Likes to explain, figure out, talk 3. Wants to relate own experiences to topic, or just to tell a story 4. Likes collections, organizing items 5. Likes chants, clever, repetitious work sounds (e.g., Dr. Seuss) 6. Easily memorizes 7. Can assimilate another language well 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Still excitable, but needs challenges 2. Judges, critiques, debates, critical 3. Likes to organize items & others 4. Shows off knowledge 5. Wants to know “behind the scenes” facts 6. Curious about WHY? for most things 7. Thinks, acts as though more knowledgeable than adults 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Concerned with present events, especially in own lives 2. Interested in justice, fairness 3. Moving toward special interests, topics 4. Can take on responsibility, independent work 5. Can do synthesis 6. Desires to express feelings, own ideas 7. Generally idealistic
<i>Teaching Methods:</i>	<i>Teaching Methods:</i>	<i>Teaching Methods:</i>	<i>Teaching Methods:</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Guide discovering 2. Explore, find things 3. Use lots of tactile items to illustrate point 4. Sing, play games, chant, recite, color, draw, paint, build 5. Use body movements 6. Short, creative projects 7. Show and Tell, drama, hear/read/tell stories 8. Field trips 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lots of hands-on work, project 2. Field trips, drama 3. Make collections, displays, models 4. Integrate subjects through above means 5. Teach and assign research projects 6. Recitations, memorization 7. Drills, games 8. Oral/written presentations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time lines, charts, maps (visual materials) 2. Debates, persuasive reports 3. Drama, reenactments, role-playing 4. Evaluate, critique (with guidelines) 5. Formal logic 6. Research projects 7. Oral/written presentations 8. Guest speakers, trips 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Drama, and presentations 2. Guide research in major areas with goal of synthesis of ideas 3. Many papers, speeches, debates 4. Give responsibilities, e.g., working with younger students, organize activities 5. In-depth field trips, even overnight 6. World view discussion



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The Excellent Student

The excellent student at Covenant is not defined by numerical grades. The following “intellectual virtues” taken from *Habits of the Mind* by James Sire challenge each teacher and student to apply biblical principles to the area of academics. They illustrate what it means to be faithful with one’s gifts and abilities—how a godly person would approach the learning process. As these virtues grow within a student academic growth will follow.

Acquisition Virtues: Passion for Truth

Inquisitiveness/Curiosity
Teachableness
Persistence
Humility

Application virtues: Passion for Holiness

Desire to apply what is learned
Love for God and others
Fortitude
Integrity
Humility

Maintenance virtues: Passion for Consistency

Perseverance
Courage
Patience
Tenacity
Humility

Communication virtues: Compassion for Others

Clarity of expression
Orderliness of presentation
Aptness of illustration
Humility

The Acquisition Virtues govern how and why people learn new things, emphasizing that truth is the goal of learning. One who exhibits these qualities will ask questions and will continue asking questions until he understands. He will not act as if he cannot learn anything from certain people or as if all his assumptions must be correct. Learning will not be limited to school hours or to academic settings. All of life is this person’s classroom.

The Maintenance Virtues remind us that effort is required not only to acquire knowledge but to retain it. When remembering or recalling information is a struggle, these characteristics cause a person to press on. This person won’t be found cramming for exams or only working hard when report card time comes close.

The Application Virtues demand that the learner do something with his knowledge. We are not to be simply collectors of information and insight; we must apply our knowledge to life. Having integrity leads people to hold themselves to the same standard to which they hold others. They practice what they preach, even when it is hard. These students are not those of which James would say that they look in the mirror but go away without fixing anything.

The Communication Virtues concern how we express our knowledge to others. Do we talk over their heads, or do we find ways to make sure that what we are saying is clear to our audience? Taking time to carefully present information, either in writing or orally, in a way that considers the audience is one way that we honor others—even when those others are teachers!

Humility dominates the lists as it speaks to the motivation behind all the other virtues. Is chasing the truth only for the purpose of dominating others? Does one put together a carefully constructed presentation only to look better than one’s classmates? Or, are one’s academic abilities and hard work offered with the recognition that all good things have come from God and are to be used for the good of others and the glory of God? The humble student refrains from flaunting either his mistakes or his successes in ways that belittle others. The humble student can celebrate others’ success and will help others in their weaknesses. The humble student measures neither himself nor others by their academic accomplishments.