



With school taking place in the home rather than in a classroom, St. Ambrose Academy (SAA), like schools everywhere, is having to adapt. But our classical pedagogy relies on interpersonal communication, Socratic dialogue, and lots of opportunities to present ideas, demonstrate reasoning, or argue a point of view in front of a group. How to deliver these experiences over the Internet?

Though St. Ambrose teachers are duplicating some classroom experiences online, they are also using the new setting to broaden student experience. Just as in a classroom, teachers illustrate important concepts with electronic whiteboards. Calculus teacher Ahrom Thompson explained, "With a doc cam, I can go back and forth from white paper to graph paper. The students show me their work on their cameras, and they call their classmates to talk over problems. If the answers don't match up, they problem-solve together."

English teacher Katie Behrens is finding that she can more easily gauge student participation online. All students, not just those who raise their hands, post responses to preparatory discussion questions. "I was blown away by the quality and consideration of their interpretation of Aeneas' passage through the Gate of False Dreams in the Aeneid," she commented. "This venue shows me how they are all engaging with the text and articulating their thoughts in a mature way."

While biology teacher Emily Swanson is sending her students into their backyards to look for arthropods, music teacher Josh Vaughn is replacing choral singing with music analysis. Vaughn also teaches gym, and after a few weeks of posting exercise routines, he recently divided students into teams to compete against each other for prizes.

The school musical is always a highlight. While the spring production *Singin' in the Rain* is postponed, director Angela Hiline calls the cast twice weekly for live video rehearsal:

"these rehearsals have been very fruitful in strengthening individual character work and maintaining a strong sense of community."

Mrs. Hiline also directs Learning Services, and she's providing extra support for students during scheduled video chats with parental oversight.

The prayers and sacrifices of our supporters have sustained SAA since the very beginning. We invite you to unite with us in praying a daily Chaplet of Divine Mercy - or a preferred prayer of your choice! - for the continued growth of our school and each student entrusted to SAA!



Guidance Counselor Dr. Mary Skemp has set up a platform for seniors to work through the quarantine's effect on college applications and AP exams. Dr. Skemp also teaches English, and she notes that in poetry writing, "the distance learning model works well: they have the time and thinking space they need to be reflective and creative."

Even while finding creative solutions to the COVID-19 challenge, there are plenty of difficulties. Science teacher Dr. Sean Monahan commented, "Since we are not face to face, I lose those visual cues" – puzzled looks, curious gazes, delighted comprehension, and, let's face it, zoned-out boredom! But the real loss, says Mrs. Swanson, is how difficult it is "to show concern and care for the students. During this time of isolation, students need to know their teachers care about them more than ever."

The Academy continues to end the school day together by praying the student-led Divine Mercy Chaplet online, and the teachers then send them merrily off: "Hug the people you love, get away from your screens, go outside, help your folks, and we'll see you again tomorrow!"

A classical education aims at training the mind, training young people to think for themselves. Director of Classical Education Dr. Constance Nielsen was delighted to see how well students have adapted. "We plopped them into a new remote-access environment," she noted. "Their classical training, creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving can be seen not only in their classwork but in how quickly they mastered

the platform itself, despite not having learned it in school. They are proving that they know how to think!"

Teachers have been delighted by the students' perseverance and commitment and parents have praised the Academy's efforts. "The speed at which St. Ambrose adopted distance learning technology and coordinated the roll-out while maintaining the high standard was impressive," said parent Sam Blahnik. "From our perspective, the SAA transition most closely resembles what college-aged students have undergone, and the school continues to exceed our expectations!"

Stephen Carey (SAA '16), a UW-Madison graduate with a degree in Computer Science first learned to code in junior high with the help of a tutor. Now, with Carey at the helm, SAA junior and senior high students have a chance to engage in this type of material for the first time as a part of the curriculum.

Carey believes that, "the biggest, most important goal, is to teach critical thinking skills. When you're approaching a game like tic tac toe or early on we made a toy banking app, the basic critical thinking problem is – I have a complicated task so how do I break this down into more simple pieces and then how do I break down those steps into the actual commands you can give the computer.

That is the skill I think is uniquely trained by programming but is translatable to any area of life."



Carey finds that games are a useful way for students to learn how to take something familiar and break it down to its most basic components.

8th grader Annika Zakrzewski had never taken a computer science class before, but appreciates the opportunity to try something new to see how she likes it. Annika described how the material can be challenging, but “it’s fun to interact with your finished code, and see the code you wrote (with help), do what you told it to do” when turning basic code commands into a calculator or games like Connect Four.

Senior Nathaniel Kruchten has always loved working on computers and signed up for the newly-offered class to get a better foundation of how programming works.

Nathaniel plans to put to use the knowledge and skills learned in this semester’s course right away as he prepares to graduate this spring: “I’ll be going into Computer Science/Computer Engineering in college and I believe this class gives me a good start for what I will be doing down the road.”

All of this is music to Carey’s ears as he hopes that students are able to explore the field either as a fun hobby or something that could lead to a career. He has nothing but the highest praise as he reflects on the students in the Computer Science classes: “I’m just in awe of them; every single one is reflective, diligent, hardworking, friendly, polite and it’s just so inspiring and so edifying for me to have such wonderful students.”

Carey sees this class as part of a much larger whole, “the mission of SAA to form and prepare students is a critical mission – we need people like this in a university classroom, in jobs across the board, in a welding school, in a culinary school, in a coffee shop.”

Wherever they go, the skills of critical thinking, creativity and adaptability learned in computer science and the other classes at SAA are preparing well-rounded students prepared for any challenge that life presents.



Alumnus Bobby Marsland, Ph.D. ('07) knows a thing or two about the sciences. Below is a reflection from Marsland looking back on his time at SAA and the preparation he gained for degrees including a Bachelor’s of Physics at Princeton, a Master’s in Philosophy of Physics from Oxford University and a Ph.D. in Physics from MIT. Marsland is now a Post-doctoral Fellow in the Theoretical Biophysics Group at Boston University.

“Looking back, I have a lot of fond memories of our SAA science classes having a ton of fun and doing demos with rockets and taking appliances apart to see what was going on inside. Surprisingly that was something I had to do later in my research, fixing some lasers that weren’t working and I thought it was funny because I done this before, taking random things apart and figured out what was going on.

At SAA I was well-prepared both in terms of academic preparation and how to write, organize my time and study for exams. Once I got to Princeton, I realized not everyone had that same kind of preparation and I



actually helped teach friends some of the study skills I had learned at SAA! My time at SAA was a great time of growth in faith too. Sciences is one way of understanding the world, but has its limitations on some of the big philosophical questions.

As the world becomes more chaotic, it's extremely important to know who you are – a baptized child of God. This is learned first in the family, but the next most important place is the school environment where it can be reinforced and taught by so many other role models, peers, and experiences. These lessons of faith are invaluable for a young person.

I think the biggest challenge that people in science are grappling with right now is in the framing of questions. You do need the technical preparation but the unique thing about SAA is you get a bigger perspective about history, philosophy, theology and having a framework to integrate and ask what are the actual problems the world is facing and how have we as a people gone about solving them.

That will help you guide the application of the technical expertise you acquired. Catholic education is the most important thing we can devote financial support to – this is the next generation of the Church at a crucial time in the Church.

SAA is Catholic education that is doing what it says: preparing faithful disciples of Christ to be a leader in whatever context and industry or vocation they find themselves.”