

WHAT IS CLASSICAL EDUCATION?

Having roots in the philosopher Socrates and methods honed by 16th c. Jesuits, classical education is a proven framework to impart what writer Dorothy Sayers called the essential “Tools of Learning,” forming not only the intellect but also the will, so that students can become disciplined self-learners, critical thinkers, and virtue leaders.

This framework posits that training in the **Trivium** (the “Three Ways” of grammar, logic, and rhetoric) will reliably create the well-rounded foundation to choose any specialized study later. These ‘Ways’ are also called ‘stages’ because they correspond to how children normally develop in sequence. We offer the same core subjects as other schools, but what sets a Classical School apart is a commitment to training in the Trivium, which enlarges young people’s capacity for knowledge, reason, and clear expression.

Grammar Stage Soaking in knowledge

What? A subject’s grammar is the body of knowledge at its foundation. Grammar aims to build up a broad inventory of facts and knowledge from which students can draw throughout their lives.

How? Students learn the building blocks of every discipline – math facts, parts of speech, scientific terms, geography, historical dates, etc. They do this especially through memorization and the use of primary sources, where students study and observe things directly rather than through the lens of summary explanation, which are prone to bias and errors. Primary sources could be original writings, recordings, or artifacts.

Logic Stage Strengthening reason and understanding

What? Logic is the study of correct reasoning and reason is the power of the mind to use knowledge to form judgments by testing ideas and relying on evidence to do so. Logic aims to discover the created truth and purpose of all things.

How? Through Socratic questioning and skills of analysis (e.g. paraphrase, outline, cause & effect, and syllogism), students learn how to test arguments for soundness. Socratic teaching is not open-ended, but “soul leading.” Rather than provide answers up-front, teachers guide students towards a goal through their own labors. Those familiar with a Socratic dialogue know that Socrates was not looking for opinions but asked questions to lead his students to the truth.

Rhetoric Stage Bearing fruit in wisdom and clarity of expression

What? Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, which along with grammar and logic, is one of the three ancient arts of discourse. Rhetoric aims toward principled, articulate, and convincing presentation of ideas.

How? Students learn and practice the five canons of rhetoric: invention (developing an argument), arrangement (structuring the argument), style (effective use of language), memory (training the mind for formal and impromptu presentation), and delivery (to inform, persuade, or motivate particular audiences in specific situations).

A young child frequently asks “*What is that?*” (grammar-oriented) and only later begins asking “*Why is it that way?*” (logic-oriented) As such, children grow and progress through these stages when developmentally ready and without abandoning earlier stages. On the contrary, it is important to strengthen grammar and the tools of learning acquired in each stage throughout life, demonstrating the *integral* nature of this educational framework.

Similarly, a classical approach endeavors to teach math, science, history, philosophy, and all subjects as an *integral* curriculum rather than a separate (or siloed) presentation of content. For example, when studying Latin, students will also reference what they are learning in English, literature, and Church and secular history, and vice versa (and at St. Ambrose, they will also learn subjects situated in four primary historical cycles, strengthening the context further). The result is a more durable and deeply held understanding across subject matter to equip going further in specialized fields.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

A classical education is also known as a “liberal education” – not in any political sense – but because such an education *liberates* the mind: to be ‘free’ to develop an integrated vision of the world as God’s gift, free from the need to be told what to think and do next, free from the tyranny of propaganda, spin, and an ever-changing tide of public opinion, free to pursue what is true, good, and beautiful. Students are free and motivated to live a well-examined, excellent life while creating the conditions for others to do the same, so that all can fulfill the duty to love God and neighbor.

Classical education at St. Ambrose is powerful because we offer this *complete, integral education*, engaging students in every dimension of their humanity: spiritual, intellectual, moral, emotional, physical, individual, and social. This well-rounded foundation produces skills to thrive such as a strong work ethic, perseverance, and confidence. Not only does this help students score well above state and national peers, importantly it inspires humility, faith, and every lifelong fruit we intend.

Today, the stakes for society could not be greater, as serious deceptions become more mainstream. It takes a complete education like this to liberate souls, civilization, and country from such harm.

A recent ground-breaking study evaluated the primary models of education in the United States and determined that the “Classical Christian Difference” bears the *most desirable and durable fruit*:

The Association of Classical Christian Schools and the University of Notre Dame published a study, “Good Soil,” that tracked thousands of 24- to 42-year-old alumni from public, secular private, standard Catholic, evangelical Christian, homeschool, and *classical Christian schools* from a variety of ecumenical backgrounds (2020).

The classical Christian schools outperformed other schools in nearly every category, including confidence and performance in college and post-graduate life, but most importantly, continuing to practice the faith into adulthood. Graduates of these schools are more likely to be regular independent readers, to pray and worship, to excel in professional work, to engage in civic and volunteer activity, to have happy and stable marriages, and more.

In short, the commitment to truth, beauty, and goodness across a classical curriculum and in every aspect of school culture achieves the best outcomes for *everyone*!



WHAT ARE OUR RESULTS?

Our first graduating class was in 2006. Our oldest graduate is 33 years old. Yet despite only 14 graduating classes, St. Ambrose is proud knowing we help produce competent, confident, and courageous adult Christian leaders ready to thrive and be leaven for our puzzled world, as highlighted by the following:

- The combined GPA for all graduating classes in our honors-equivalent program is 3.7.
- The average ACT composite score for the past five years is 27.5, seven points higher than state and national averages.
- Over 90% of graduates have matriculated to top universities and military academies all time.
 - Over 15% of our male graduates have formally discerned priesthood, and our first alum was ordained in June 2021. Also, two alumnae have entered religious life.
 - Over 40% of graduates have elected to pursue advanced study or careers in STEM-related fields. Three early graduates have earned PhDs in the past five years, contributing novel research to the areas of biophysics, organic chemistry, and physical therapy.
- Our musical theater program has been recognized for “Best Show” by the Overture Center 3 of the past 5 performance years for southern Wisconsin, head-to-head with the largest public and private high schools, in addition to many individual student awards. Over 90% of students participate in broad extracurriculars annually for a well-rounded formation.
- Students contribute over 1,800 hours to help and improve our local communities each year. The visible witness of students at pro-life vigils, as one example, has directly resulted in moms choosing life for their babies. The local pregnancy help center coordinator wrote to say how impressed (“gobsmacked!”) she was that our student volunteers wanted to stay on a Saturday until the last bag was sorted, remarking, “This has literally never happened before!” and “It’s a great indication of the caliber of young people you have at your school and I cannot tell you how grateful we are to have them!”
- Students and graduates live out their discipleship joyfully in so many varied ways, from marrying and having children, to leading parish Bible studies and water projects to benefit African communities, winning sprint car and snowmobile races, entertaining and visiting elder friends at All Saints Neighborhood, uplifting political lobbying in our nation’s Capital, creating master art, and much, much more! The education at St. Ambrose bears outstanding fruit in a young person’s life for decades to come as they build upon a firm foundation of Catholic values and academic rigor, helping them reach their highest potential and be firmly oriented to the service of God and humanity.

WHAT DO ALUMNI & STUDENTS SAY?



"I'm still blown away by the academic preparation and the commitment to the spiritual life that I received at St. Ambrose Academy. Going through the Naval Academy was challenging, but I was so well prepared by my teachers and peers at SAA."

Learning to do the right thing, being able to attend Mass and having an appreciation for the beauty of the sacraments and making that a central part of your life are gifts that I will take with me forever."

**- William Donohoe, Class of 2017
2nd Lieutenant, U.S. Marine Corps**

TOP-NOTCH FACULTY

"One of the best parts of St. Ambrose Academy is the teachers. They're so personal and they understand how to connect what we're learning in any class to the faith in really natural ways. They're also hilarious and just really good teachers! What we learn in class is more than just taking in information."

Everything we are doing helps us become better people and live our Catholic faith in the world."

- Joshua Z., Class of 2024

INTEGRATED ACADEMICS

"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."

**- Dr. Robert Marsland, Class of 2007
Ph.D. in Biophysics, M.I.T.
Seminar for Opus Dei in Rome, Italy**