



An Introduction to St. Monica Academy

St. Monica Academy is a Catholic classical liberal arts high school program founded in 2020. Through intellectual friendship with a close group of classmates and faculty, students systematically explore the universal human questions that have occupied Catholic culture and thought throughout two millennia. We seek to help families form young people who pursue joy, beauty, and virtue in their learning and their relationships. Our aim is to nurture clarity of thought and love for truth, guided by the wisdom of the Catholic Church.

During its first three years of existence, St. Monica Academy has operated as a pilot program under the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle and a homeschool extension under Washington State law. The 2022-2023 school year will likely be the final year of our pilot. We are in the process of applying for recognition from the Seattle Archdiocese. If approved, we would enter the Western Catholic Education Association's accreditation cycle beginning in the fall of 2023.

The information below is intended to give prospective families, educators, and stakeholders a better sense of our program.

What is a “Catholic classical liberal arts education”?

The contemporary connotation of the “liberal arts” refers to fields of study one might find in a university school of humanities—history, literature, philosophy, etc. Our curriculum is more in line with a contemporary revival of the liberal arts as first consolidated at the Vivarium, a twin monastery of nuns and monks founded in 6th-century Italy by Cassiodorus, a Roman political counselor and scholar. Cassiodorus' educational plan enumerated seven liberal arts—the trivium (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). The monastics of the Vivarium treated these “liberal” or freeing arts as formation for a life of prayer and apostolic work. They insisted that all of Greek and Roman culture—indeed all of past human learning—was their rightful inheritance by virtue of their status as children of the LORD of history. Catholic “classical” education in the 21st century continues to offer the monastic synthesis of “pagan” antiquity and Christian culture as a solid foundation for humane study.

While the decades-old revival of classical education in America has many shades and flavors, at St. Monica Academy, our educational philosophy might be best described by certain marks:

1. **Informed by Classical Psychology:** The stages of the trivium culminate in the rhetoric stage, wherein students combine logical skill with emotional appeals in coming to truth. This characterizes students in late adolescence—they are hungry to weigh competing ideas and come to conclusions about questions that deeply matter. Thus our pedagogy places a heavy focus on seminars.
2. **Depth vs. Breadth:** Our school is less concerned with mastery of a wide variety of subject matter and more concerned with the development of intellectual skills and virtues. In practice, this means reading a few challenging works slowly.
3. **Memory as Possession:** Students often interrogate the utility of school learning by asking “when will I use this?” We believe that knowledge, particularly of beautiful things, remains with the person and is valuable for its own sake. Recitation is a small but essential part of our curriculum. Students will carry memorized poetry, prayers, and speeches with them for the rest of their lives.
4. **Emphasis on Primary Sources:** In our humanities classes, students learn primarily through reading texts written in the period of study. We believe that reading is best thought of as a great conversation with another mind, and it’s best to have conversations face-to-face. This means that many of our texts require scaffolding to aid students’ comprehension and decoding skills, but the reward is an encounter with a great work.
5. **Canonicity and Particularity:** We do believe that we’re able to evaluate the quality of a written work and its underlying ideas by a comparison with the inextricable criteria of every human heart—the need for truth, beauty, goodness, justice, and love. This means that many of the works we read might in some contexts be considered “classics.” We simply believe that the primary texts we have chosen are enormously helpful in forming virtuous and happy persons and help us to understand the cultural, social, political, and structural context in which we find ourselves. This emphasis on the origins of culture in a particular place means that our curriculum does place some emphasis (although not exclusive emphasis) on the Western tradition, and particularly the Catholic intellectual tradition. Rather than having a restricting or narrowing effect, we believe that an intentional focus on the human heart and commitment to catholicity necessitates both an exploration of the diversity of peoples in the ancient world as well as attention to the voices of racial and ethnic minorities in the Americas.
6. **Integration of Knowledge:** Our humanities curriculum is broken into a four-year historical cycle. Theology, history, and literature classes focus on a unified time period: the Ancient Year in 9th grade, the Medieval Year in 10th, the Modern Year in 11th, and the American Year in 12th. The effect is an immersion in the concerns and thoughts of those who lived during each period and the historical developments concurrent with theological controversies and literary change. At the end of their four years, students have a deeper understanding of the origins of their cultural circumstances. They also develop a deeper awareness of the working of the Holy Spirit throughout human history.
7. **Learning as Conversation:** Seminars form the focal point of each humanities course. Our teachers employ both Socratic and Harkness-style seminars for a good portion of each instructional week. In conversation with their peers, students can ask challenging questions, bring their deepest curiosities to light, and develop the intellectual habits that will serve them in postsecondary study and in life.

We are members of the Institute for Catholic Liberal Education, a network of Catholic classical schools across the nation. More information on contemporary classical education can be found through the ICLE.¹

Our curriculum

Our high school program can best be thought of as an extension of our K-8 curriculum, modeled after the Educational Plan of St. Jerome Academy.² Our humanities courses (theology, history, and literature) follow a four-year historical cycle focusing on the ancient, medieval, and modern worlds and the study of the American experience. Each historical year corresponds to a course in the philosophy and science and modern science: biology, physics, chemistry in the first three years, culminating in an integrated calculus and advanced physics course in the final year. Theology courses combine scripture study, systematic theology, and spiritual practice. Students walk through salvation history from the Pentateuch to John's Revelation while they explore the historical development of Christian theology. Simultaneously, students are introduced to spiritual practices—from *lectio divina* to Ignatian discernment of spirits—which have emerged throughout the Church's history.

As our program is very new, currently cohorts of underclassmen proceed through the humanities and science curriculum together. This means that current 9th and 10th graders are taking medieval year courses together, with some differentiation in assessments based on grade level. As our numbers increase, cohorts will begin the cycle anew.

St. Monica employs a “walk to math” schedule in which each student in grades K-12 study math during the same period of the day. Students are placed in the math class that best meets their needs and experience. Students may enter 9th grade in either Algebra (on grade level), Geometry, or Algebra II. As our current cohort advances, we plan to provide a Precalculus/Trigonometry course and a Calculus course depending on student need.

Students likewise take Latin beginning in their 9th grade year. While two years of Latin are required, students are encouraged to pursue study all four years. Placements in Latin I, II, III, or IV are tailored to students' needs and past coursework. Advanced Placement (AP) Latin in the fourth year is available if desired.

Physical education and art form an essential part of our curriculum. These courses are not electives but help constitute a coherent education. Students develop their aesthetic sensibilities and taste for beauty in art classes integrated with the classical humanities cycle. In the gym, they work towards reverence for the human body and building life-long routines to promote physical health.

Our pedagogy

¹ Additional reading on contemporary Catholic classical education may be found here: [Suggested Reading - Institute for Catholic Liberal Education](#).

² St. Jerome Academy is a K-8 parochial school at St. Jerome Catholic Parish in Hyattsville, Maryland. The school was one of the first American parochial schools in recent history to transition to a classical curriculum. The Educational Plan may be found at [The-Educational-Plan-of-SJA-2020-edition.pdf \(catholicliberaleducation.org\)](#).

The hallmarks of our courses—primary texts and seminars—require that students develop close reading and public speaking skills. Our faculty provide extensive instruction and guidance in close reading and annotation as well as coaching and feedback in seminar participation. We find that these core academic skills prepare students not only for higher education but for a fulfilling intellectual life.

Faith life

In addition to coursework in Catholic theology and spirituality, students participate in the faith life of the larger St. Monica Catholic School. Students attend Mass each Friday and spend time in Eucharistic Adoration on the first Monday of each month. Students and families are also encouraged to attend daily Mass at the parish before school Monday through Thursday. This year, we will be adding a service-learning component and retreat experience.

Extracurricular activities

The social atmosphere at St. Monica Academy resembles that of a family. In lieu of convention offerings such as homecoming, prom, or student government, our school parents have organized gatherings that support students' friendship in Christ and maturity as young men and women. These include weekly picnics, a formal fall dinner, a Christmas party, service projects, and an Easter celebration. As we grow, we hope to offer extracurriculars such as theater, choir, and debate.

What about sports?

From the postwar to the present, the typical American high school experience has involved competitive sports. Our present size precludes organized sports for the most part. Under WIAA policy, students are able to compete for their local public high school in any sport of their choosing. For students on Mercer Island, we are conveniently located across the street from Mercer Island High School. If the program were to grow to capacity (60-70 students), we would consider partnering with other small Mercer Island high schools to field teams or to pursue athletic offerings suitable for smaller teams.

Support for students with learning differences

“Classical education” often carries visions of towering pillars, luxurious books, refined dress, and thus unfortunately a connection with a cultural or academic “elite.” Consistent with its monastic roots and Catholic social teaching, we believe that a classical education should be available to any student who desires it. Our school employs a dedicated student support specialist, and our teachers differentiate instruction based on unique student needs. We work with every family to ensure that all students have access to curriculum at St. Monica Academy.

Technology

We believe that the best educational experiences occur without the intermediary of a screen. While laptops are available and used for particular student assignments and skill-building, this is

not the norm. Our use of technology is best described as intentional and person-focused. School policy also requires students to store cell phones in their home room for the duration of the school day. We find that without competition from the shallow yet exciting digital universe, students are better able to focus on more transcendent and humane concerns.

Mentoring

We have recently initiated a mentoring program modeled after an innovative program at the Heights School outside of Washington, D.C. Each student is paired with a faculty mentor of the same sex and meets for monthly lunch conversations. Mentorship aims at helping students acclimatize to the school, develop intellectual habits, grow in virtue, and increase in faith.

School size

Our current enrollment consists of 10 students, 9 of which are in 9th or 10th grade. We typically enroll 5-10 new students per year, with many families moving out of state. As a seminar-intensive pedagogy requires a rather close-knit school community, we are committed to keeping class sizes to no more than 15-20 students per grade.

What kinds of students flourish at St. Monica Academy?

We find that students who value close friendships more than breadth of social opportunities, deep conversation over a variety of course offerings, and a family atmosphere over the energy of a larger institution do well here. Our school and curriculum offer an atmosphere steeped in the Catholic faith in a novel way; families who are comfortable with a less-conventional option often find the program attractive.

Tuition

Tuition for St. Monica Academy for the 2022-2023 school year is \$10,400. We do have tuition assistance available and work to make St. Monica Academy accessible for all families.

Dates

Open house: Wednesday, November 30th, 2022. 5pm-7pm.

Applications open for 2023-2024 school year: December 1st, 2022

Applications due: January 6th, 2023

Parent Perspectives

A few thoughts from some of our current parents:

“We are so grateful to be in our second year at Saint Monica Academy! Our son is engaged and challenged in his studies, and has a strong bond with his fellow classmates. The teachers are brilliant and care wholeheartedly about the students, encouraging them to grow in virtue on a

daily basis. SMA is a blessing to us and fills a unique need in the diocese for a Catholic classical high school program.”

“We’ve had the privilege of having our oldest children attend St Monica Academy and they were beautifully inspired by the teachers, the materials and the environment. We have two children currently enrolled, and we are grateful for the continued opportunity for them to learn and be challenged by an authentic Catholic vision of the human person through the beauty of a classical curriculum approach. There is no other institution offering this unique approach in the Seattle area, and we look forward to the rest of our children benefiting from the awesome work that St Monica Academy is undertaking.”

“SMA has been a game changer for us. I wanted a classical Catholic education for my daughter and could find nothing within the area. Previously my daughter went to a public school and the difference in safety, inclusion, Christ centered teaching and the level of learning has been phenomenal. There is nothing like it in the area if you want an exceptional education centered on Christ!”

Contact

For information regarding curriculum and program development, please contact Marybeth Bohm, Principal at mbohm@stmonicasea.org or Brett Bertucio, Vice Principal, at bbertucio@stmonicasea.org.

For information and inquiries regarding application and enrollment, please contact Jamie North, Advancement Director, at jnorth@stmonicasea.org.

Please also feel free to call the school office at 206-232-5432.