

The Catholic and Benedictine Character of a Priory Education

The Saint Louis Priory School’s educational philosophy is rooted in its Catholic and Benedictine identity. Just as the Apostle Paul exhorts us to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Rom 12:2), a Priory education aims to *transform*. Priory’s approach is about imparting foundational knowledge and orienting the whole person—mind, body, and soul—towards divine wisdom. As a community rooted in Christ, Priory nurtures young men to know the truth and do the good, preparing them for academic success and a life lived in service to God and others.

Foundations: The Catholic Intellectual Tradition and the Liberal Arts

The ancient tradition of a broad, non-specialized approach to education characteristic of the Liberal Arts has oriented Priory since its inception and continues to guide Priory today. The Liberal Arts, or “Free” Arts, were so-called because their students received the privilege of leisure to study, free (*liberalis*) from practical concerns, the *trivium* (rhetoric, grammar, and logic) and the *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and music). These subjects comprised a broad body of human knowledge, study, and practice—from literature and the fine arts to math and science. This tradition established an intellectual culture in which mathematicians were free to explore numbers in theory, scientists were free to experiment with natural phenomena, poets were free to play with speech and sound, and theologians were free to apply their minds to the most profound mysteries of Catholic faith.

College preparatory schools like Priory were established to prepare students for success at such higher endeavors. At Priory, we aim to give students a firm grounding in the core subjects that prepare students for success in this great tradition, transforming them to become conscientious citizens of the wider world. We admit intellectually curious young men ready to engage with the high-level thinking that drives our classes. Whether by deepening their understanding of human culture, pursuing scientific experimentation and exploration, or engaging in sheer wonder at nature, Priory students are graduated to enter into the culture of intellectual inquiry in college and beyond because they have already begun to experience that culture here.

Priory’s curriculum is rich and rigorous. It privileges foreign language study—both ancient and modern. Linguistic competence is not merely a tool for communication but a gateway to intellectual growth and intercultural competence, leading to broad cultural appreciation and a way to connect with literature from many different points of view. In Humanities courses (English and Social Studies), students are exposed to challenging literature, given a strong foundation in competent English expression, and invited to master a broad body of historical and cultural knowledge and skills—from ancient civilizations to the modern era. In Science, Mathematics, and Technology, students acquire the rigorous training and healthy curiosity required for excellence in further study. The Arts offer students the opportunity to excel at a high level in one form of artistic expression, whether in Visual Arts (Studio Art or Medieval Arts) or the Performing Arts (Vocal Music or Theatre). Theology is required of all students at every level in the program to ensure that students are continually invited to deepen their understanding of how Catholic faith coheres.

Priory's Philosophy of Education

Intellectual, Human, and Spiritual Transformation

In light of God's creation of human beings as finding fulfillment in rational growth, the Catholic intellectual tradition extols discovery and interdisciplinary exploration as one of the highest goods humans can pursue. Students in this tradition are equipped to master large bodies of complex knowledge and to make broad connections that lead to new depths of inquiry. Priory's faculty are not only highly qualified, but also disposed to an intellectual culture that values inquiry, not merely as a means to an end, but for its own sake. This goes beyond adhering to rote doctrine and emphasizes a living tradition of "handing on the faith" through dialogue and conversation. All Priory educators are guides to whom students can look for formative wisdom as they navigate the complexities of life, both inside and outside the classroom.

Priory's program in Human and Spiritual Formation is a community-wide effort to form students in moral virtue. The faculty partners with parents in the intellectual and moral transformation of their sons. Form Masters and Faculty Advisors lead students in an iterative process of growth towards the depth of character that comes from increased justice, courage, honesty, self-control, and prudence. Priory's curricular sports requirement means that boys develop virtue both physically on the athletic field and intellectually in the classroom.

Priory's educational culture values inquiry, but not at the expense of knowledge mastery. Priory teachers combine the best of traditional and innovative pedagogical practices to enhance student engagement without sacrificing rigorous standards. Students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning and to develop broad mastery. They are expected to take a path of continual growth in autonomy. Students also develop in terms of organizational character, nurturing key habits of mind that come from planning, time management, and self-regulation. Teachers provide ongoing assessment of student growth with regular, detailed, and targeted feedback. Their classrooms are responsive, so that students are supported to maximize their potential regardless of circumstance. In the words of St. Benedict, "the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from" (RB 64.19).

Priory's Catholic identity means that in many ways formal and informal, all of its students are steeped in the Catholic faith. At Priory, Catholic students are nurtured in their faith through a re-discovery of the intellectual foundations of that faith. Non-Catholic and non-religious students are invited to gain an appreciation for Catholic culture and teaching while they are here; they are treated with the same warmth of hospitality given to all students in a Benedictine school.

On Education and Technology

At Priory, technology is neither upheld as an unmitigated good nor shunned as a necessary evil. The value of any particular technology depends primarily upon its use. Therefore, we work on a continual basis to discern whether any given technology will enhance the ability of the student to gain knowledge mastery, to develop appropriate skills, and to excel in the curriculum. If the answer is "Yes," then technology may be helpful to augment the learning experience, and teachers are broadly encouraged to use any tools that may better prepare Priory students academically. At the same time, faculty retain autonomy to determine how best to apply technology adopted by the school more broadly.