



# Academia

Vol. 1 No. 3

## Academia

Augustine School's Monthly Academic Newsletter

Welcome to a new issue of *Academia*! In this issue, I share testimonials regarding former Augustine students, highlight student achievement in the area of fine arts, share my spring recitation introductory remarks, and answer a question about the role of technology in education.

Blessings in Christ,

Seth Drown  
Dean of Academic Affairs

### Testimonials

Recently, I received two testimonials regarding former Augustine students who have met with success since leaving Augustine School. The first is from the Bells. Denise Bell shared with me that Bailey, who graduated from Augustine last year, has won the freshman English award at Trinity Christian Academy this year. Congratulations, Bailey, for being a great example of a scholar-athlete!

The second testimonial is from the Whites. The Whites were one of the founding families of Augustine School, so we were especially sorry to see Darin, Laura, and their wonderful children leave the school last December when Darin took a job in Alabama. Recently, Darin emailed us to let us know how the kids are doing in their new school. Here is his email:

*Hello from Bama:*

*Just a quick update. Daniel, Corey, and Avery are now attending one of the top academic public schools in the nation. For example, the math team has won 14 of the last 16 national championships and the English department is rated top notch as well. Over the last few years the school has placed dozens of kids into schools like Vanderbilt, Yale, Columbia, Notre Dame, MIT, Duke, and Colgate.*

*So how are Daniel, Corey, and Avery doing? Corey has straight A's and just won a major part in the Spring musical, Avery has all A's and one very high B, and Daniel has all A's and B's. I would say Augustine has done a great job of preparing them for this new academic challenge! Interestingly, they are all making above 97% in English.*

*I cannot thank everyone at Augustine enough for the excellent academic and spiritual foundation you have built in our kids.*

*Darin*

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## Student Achievement

This spring our students participated in an art contest called *The Color of Music* sponsored by The Jackson Symphony League. In this contest, students listen to pieces of classical music while drawing or painting. The artwork is then submitted and judged. Finally, the students attend a symphony concert featuring the music they heard. Out of over 4,000 entries from schools throughout West Tennessee, we had four blue-ribbon winners and two honorable mentions.

### Blue-Ribbon Winners:

Christopher Jenkins (1<sup>st</sup> grade)  
Jessica Kate Welsch (3<sup>rd</sup> grade)  
Maggie Jenkins (5<sup>th</sup> grade)  
Maverick Mears (8<sup>th</sup> grade)

### Honorable Mention:

Abigail Neel (3<sup>rd</sup> grade)  
Keelie Springer (4<sup>th</sup> grade)

Please join me in congratulating our talented students and their teachers, Mrs. Caroline Hull (music) and Mrs. Elise Welsch (art).

## 2008- 2009 Spring Recitation Introductory Remarks

Every recitation provides an opportunity to see classical Christian education in action, and although we cannot represent the full scope and complexity of a classical Christian education in a short presentation, I thought I would at least mention the three major components of every education and say a word or two about how classical Christian education approaches them so that you can keep an eye out for these components as you enjoy this year's Spring Recitation on Thursday, May 21st.

There are really three things that every education has in one form or another

- 1) A Purpose
- 2) A Curriculum
- 3) Teachers

1) The *purpose* of a particular educational program is usually found explicitly stated in the school's mission statement. Our mission statement says that our purpose is "to assist Christian parents in their task of raising their children to the glory of God, by means of an education which is biblically-based, gospel-centered, and classically informed. Augustine School seeks to teach children to pursue truth, goodness and beauty through the seven liberal arts and sciences under the universal lordship of Christ. Augustine School aspires to develop students who love God with their heart, soul, mind and strength, who possess a Christian worldview, who are grounded in the Western intellectual inheritance, who have a genuine desire for learning, and who seek to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

2) So much for our purpose, but what about our *curriculum*? The word *curriculum* literally means a "course" or "path," so a curriculum is the course (or path) of study and instruction one takes to reach the end (or goal) outlined in the mission statement – in our case the destination of wisdom, virtue, truth, goodness, beauty, and ultimately the Triune God of Scripture who defines and is all of those things perfectly. Our mission statement mentions that our curriculum is Biblically-based, gospel-centered, and classically informed. It also mentions the seven liberal arts and sciences, which for centuries have been the core of the classical Christian path. In addition, we place a heavy emphasis on learning and enjoying the fine arts, such as music and art. Notice that our curriculum flows directly from our purpose. Because our destination is to grow towards things like wisdom, virtue, truth, goodness, and beauty – and ultimately towards God – our path must reflect those values at every step and be based on God's Word which gives them their meaning.

A classical Christian education is highly ordered, coherent, and integrated at every level because the God of Scripture is a God of order and not of chaos. We use our history cycle (understood as "His-story") as the central hub that unites everything else we do, such as the literature we read and the songs we sing. We realize that virtue is the *foundation* of wisdom and that true wisdom *cannot* be attained by one who is irreverent or undisciplined or unloving.

At Augustine School, we seek to use all three of the three major types of teaching and learning: 1) *didactic instruction* (or “telling”) for imparting information and knowledge, 2) *guided instruction* for coaching and mentoring skills such as reading, writing, thinking, and speaking, and 3) *Socratic dialogue* (or “purposeful questioning”) for helping students understand important ideas and concepts.

The mission statement mentions helping students to become “grounded in the western intellectual inheritance,” so we seek to surround students with the best works of literature, art, and thought of western culture. We place a greater emphasis on *imitating* and *analyzing* these great models than modern schools typically do. Likewise, we understand the value of *memorization*, which is simultaneously an act of honoring and internalizing excellence.

3) Finally – after one has decided on a purpose (or destination) and the curriculum (or path) to reach it – one needs *teachers* to lead students down it. Our teachers are Christian men and women who understand teaching as a calling. They are gifted, dedicated, and caring. They are learning to teach and to think classically and Christianly, and they are committed to leading students down the path of wisdom, virtue, and maturity in Christ.

So as you enjoy the program, keep in mind that there is a lot behind what you are seeing. Behind each poem, song, speech, and skit is a God-honoring and God-ordained purpose, a classical Christian curriculum, and a skilled, God-fearing teacher.

### **Academics FAQ**

*Why does Augustine School not offer computer classes and have students using computers in the classroom?*

The short answer is that we are skeptical about the supposed benefits and concerned about some of the potential side-effects of having computers in the K-8 classroom. We see no evidence that the intellectual level of society (or even of the average student) has risen since computers have become commonplace classroom fixtures (quite the contrary!). In other words, we try to model the very critical thinking that we teach our students by asking questions such as “What is the evidence that computers in the classroom make our students better thinkers and readers?” and “To what extent are current beliefs about technology and education based on unexamined assumptions?”

As always, one must begin to think about these issues with a particular end in view. What is the end (or goal) of a classical Christian education? The ultimate end is for our students to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. One of the ways schools can prepare students for that end is by cultivating the higher reading and thinking skills necessary to study Scripture and Christian theology. So an important question for us is this: “Do computers in the classroom help or hinder the pursuit of higher reading and thinking skills?” There is much we could say in answer to that question, but let me at least begin to answer the question by making three observations.

First, computers are an increasingly necessary part of daily life in twenty-first century society. I think it is safe to say that most careers require the use of computers to some degree, and therefore, it is important for every person to acquire basic computer skills at some point in their lives simply to function in society. Since most colleges communicate with students through email and most college professors require papers to be typed, a reasonable goal is for every student to acquire basic computer skills before going to college.

That said (and this is my second observation), it is not necessary to use computers in the classroom to become adept at using them by the time one enters college--as the many thousands of us who grew up without computers in the classroom can attest (and that was when we still had to type in commands in MS-DOS!). Occasional computer use at home, supervised by the parent, is more than enough to get students familiar with the basics and to prepare them for more extensive use in high school and beyond.

Third (and most important), there is increasing evidence that excessive computer use may contribute to the formation of bad habits of mind and ultimately hinder one from developing the kinds of reading and thinking skills we wish to cultivate in our students. On the other hand, print “technologies” are centuries old, and we know very well what kinds of mental habits they form. Fortunately, those are the very habits we are interested in at Augustine School! As mentioned above, we want our students to be able to read and understand Scripture (and other complex texts) at the highest possible level, and that requires habits of mind and soul that come from being immersed and trained in the “slow” world of the printed word: focus, concentration, attention, and contemplation—habits that are in all too short supply in our fast-paced, modern lives. To paraphrase a recent article: we want our students to be scuba divers of words, texts, and ideas—diving deeply into them—rather than noisy jet-skiers skimming across their surfaces.

I encourage our parents to familiarize themselves with some of the concerns over excessive computer use that are being raised both by members of the scientific community and by thoughtful Christians. Below is a sample of some recent popular articles on the topic, copies of which are available in the school office. These only scratch the surface of the topic, and they do not address the question of "How much is too much?" but they will at least provide a sense of some of the key issues involved.

Carr, Nicholas. "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic*. July/August 2008. <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/google> ).

Myers, Ken. "That's Why They Call Them Browsers." *Periodical Abstract*. August 2008. <http://www.marshillaudio.org/resources/article.asp?id=172>

Settle, Marc. "Is Computer Use Changing Children." BBC News. August 15, 2008. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/7564152.stm>

Coquia, Maricor. "Faculty Address: 'Critical Reading in Crisis.'" *The Highlander*. October 6, 2008. <http://media.www.regishighlander.com/media/storage/paper943/news/2008/10/06/News/Faculty.Address.critical.Reading.In.Crisis-3472049.shtml>