

# School of Rhetoric

## **Content**

The content of the School of Rhetoric continues Nova Classical Academy's focus on primary texts, rather than secondary works or textbooks. Our students study both Great Ideas and Great Books<sup>1</sup> with the goal of a well-formed understanding of the great ideas, texts, events and people of Western civilization. In keeping with the model that we have employed successfully since the start of Nova Classical Academy, we here continue the practice of using history as our guiding principle and continue our division of history into four eras. The School of Rhetoric advances previous instruction; students work with increasingly advanced primary texts in order to both develop a deeper understanding of history and a clear conception of how ideas have unfolded over time.

## **Pedagogy**

Regular and consistent instruction in the art of close reading is an essential feature of an education at the School of Rhetoric. Our students are taught that it does no good to rush through a book, especially a text selected because it is worth reading time and again. They learn to read with increasing sophistication and judgment, to attend to details both large and small, and to track nuance in both style and argument. Working through texts in a careful and conscientious manner serves to develop habits of mind that are an essential life skill. Those who have learned to read and discuss the Great Books are equipped to analyze new arguments; and the habits learned in presenting and arguing the complex ideas found in the Great Books facilitate development of the powers of thought students will need in college and beyond.

## **Practice**

In the School of Rhetoric, the use of seminars provides a mode of assessing how well students have mastered ideas and allows them multiple opportunities to practice essential intellectual and communication skills. For these reasons, the cornerstone of the School of Rhetoric's pedagogical practice is the seminar. Central to the use of the seminar as a mode of instruction is the belief that an idea is not fully grasped until both a claim and its underpinnings can be expressed and defended by the student in his or her own words. Seminars are an appropriate technique for the School of Rhetoric in their multiple intertwined functions: they model clear thinking and they afford students rich opportunities to master the art of constructing and communicating their thinking to others.

## **Virtue Education**

The texts chosen and modes of instruction work to support Nova Classical Academy's commitment to virtue education. Our aim in instilling habits of intellectual inquiry is to perfect students' abilities to think for themselves and to choose freely a life that embodies virtue. The interplay of rich texts and rigorous seminars affords students a chance to grapple with the most fundamental questions and to contemplate the answers provided by a variety of thinkers. The seminars are more than an arena for intellectual conversation: they are also moral exemplars of how we wish our students to treat others and their ideas. In this sense, seminars serve as regular exercises in the norms and practices of civil discourse. Seminars advance moral and intellectual excellence by bringing to life the cultural expectation that our students strive to be respectful, tactful and kind even in the heat of rigorous intellectual disagreement.

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to Mortimer Adler's work and the Great Books