

Dear Rhetoric families,

I'm writing to highlight a few things happening in the Rhetoric School, hoping that you don't mind an email in addition to Covenant Copy. Included here is vital information and joyful celebration about the following topics:

1. Rhetoric out-of-state travel;
2. Senior Sweatshirt Day;
3. Declamation;
4. Rhetoric Chapel;
5. Senior Thesis; and
6. What we're doing about Artificial Intelligence.

Please read in full. I'll link a copy of this communication to the Rhetoric tab of Covenant Copy, too, for your reference.

Out-of-state travel: As you know, the Rhetoric School offers multiple opportunities for school-sponsored educational trips. This year, we're sending groups to Italy and to the Galapagos Islands over spring break. In coming years, we'll send groups to England, Austria, Italy (again), and other destinations. If you're interested, please review the [attached schedule](#), with anticipated costs and trip eligibility requirements. Contact Chris Schmidt or the designated trip leader with questions.

Senior Sweatshirt Day happened on Monday of last week. Parents arrived on campus, banged pots and pans, and surprised the senior class with a chance to leave school for a day of fun and festivity. Seniors also got a gift from the Rhetoric School: a sweatshirt designed by the senior class, which is approved outerwear for the rest of the year. This year's sweatshirt features a knight taking his leisure beneath a tree, with the reference Matthew 20:26 underneath. (Get it? Class of 2026.)

9th through 11th grade parents: for your planning purposes, the sweatshirt, food, and festivities are covered. We work hard at Covenant not to "nickel and dime" parents with expenses in excess of tuition. (As a side note, please let me know if a school expense pops up unexpectedly, and we'll address it if we can.)

Declamation season is upon us. This year, we asked students to select their speeches a bit earlier—before Thanksgiving Break—so they'd have a few more weeks to practice. 9th to 11th graders will declaim for a grade the week of January 26. Please also save the date for Declamation Night on February 19, 7:00 p.m., at Northwest Bible Church—a required evening event (chapel dress) for all Logic and Rhetoric students.

There are two ways to help your Rhetoric students succeed at Declamation. The first is to remind them that memorization is only the first step. They should have the speech memorized at least a week early so that they can practice delivery: pacing, eye contact, enunciation, vocal projection, and emotional engagement.

Second, encourage students to learn about the speech's historical context and purpose. Talk to your child about the speech: Who were the speaker and audience? What's the main idea? What's the most rousing passage, and why?

Like everything we do at Covenant, Declamation can be meaningful and memorable...or it can be just another hoop to jump through. Help us aim for the former, not the latter.

Rhetoric Chapel is every Thursday at 10:00 a.m. in the Commons. Students lead worship; faculty and seniors take turns preaching. This year, we are reading through the book of Hebrews, and parents are always welcome to attend. On Nov. 13, Rhetoric Science teacher Jason Stevenson will preach on "Jesus our great high priest"; next week, on Nov. 20, I will preach on people who "fall away" from the faith, and will be sharing my testimony.

Senior Thesis will look different this year. To elevate the tone of the event and to involve the entire Rhetoric School, we've decided to organize our presentations as an academic conference that all Rhetoric students and faculty will attend. The event will be held off campus at the Davidson-Gundy Alumni Center at the University of Texas at Dallas, February 10-11.

As always, we invite all Covenant parents to attend. However, we will give priority seating to families of current seniors. Siblings in Logic and Grammar Schools are also invited to come with their parents.

Look for communication in December to sign up to attend. If you have questions about the event, email Chris Schmidt.

Artificial Intelligence, especially generative AI, continues to alter the landscape of education around the world—and will certainly continue to transform our economy in years to come. In the Rhetoric School, the primary advice we are giving students at this time is never to use generative AI (ChatGPT, etc.) for school work unless a teacher explicitly instructs them to do so.

Your students will see a small number of assignments in coming years that train them to use AI thoughtfully and ethically. However, on the vast majority of assignments, we find that AI stunts our students' intellectual growth by doing important work for them. Research, reading, problem solving, writing, and editing are all emergent skills for our students—and we want them to build those skills the old-fashioned way, through practice and intellectual exercise. Please reinforce this message with your children when questions arise.

I've also heard questions from a number of parents about the proper way to **help your child write or edit a paper**. Many parents take a hands-off approach in high school, expecting the student to do all the work of writing and editing. I support that decision. However, I know that some students continue to need support and coaching in their high school years. (I'll always remember the long hours I spent at my kitchen table, laboring over the best way to write a sentence, often with my mother or father sitting next to me and offering advice. Those were the years when I really learned to write.) If you think such support is necessary or prudent, and you're willing to offer it, please know that it's welcome—so long as your child is doing the writing and editing, and is learning to be a better writer. However, the minute a parent, sibling, or peer sits at the computer or holds the pencil and begins making changes to the document, the "helper" has become the writer—and it's essentially the same as plagiarism or AI misuse. The student

should never relinquish responsibility for the writing—even for small decisions like the placement of a comma or a period. We want our students to learn the skill and understand how to apply it. I hope this distinction is helpful to you as you seek to support your child's growth.

Thank you for the privilege of teaching and shepherding your children. We've had a great start, and look forward to a strong finish to the fall semester.