

Veritas Christi Hybrid Academy

Teacher Handbook

This document describes some of the philosophies, policies and commitments for teachers at Veritas Christi Hybrid Academy. The current Board consists of CJ Newburn, Head of School, Amy Newburn and Celeste DalPra.

Philosophy and Approach

Veritas Christi means *truth of Christ*. As members of the Body of Christ, we seek to discover and discern what is good, true and beautiful in the world around us. We then learn how to articulate what is true, and to express that to others, charitably and effectively.

We take as our model Jesus, who said, *I am the way, the truth and the life*. In Latin, this is expressed as *via, veritas, vita*.

Guiding Principles

Here are brief statements of some of our guiding principles. Please discuss these with your students.

- We seek to imitate the Trinity and the Body of Christ in our unity, collaboration and charity.
 - o We recognize and respect differences, and are quick to show mercy and compassion.
 - o We seek to listen and understand without having to be in full agreement with one another's views: "unity without uniformity."
 - o We strive for regular, open, direct and charitable communication.
- We operate with pragmatic charity.
 - o We set and aspire to lofty goals, but we're pragmatic about what works along the path.
 - o We're all growing and learning together how to be most effective.
 - o We have a trust among one another that enables us to openly share what's working and what's not, and what we're striving to grow in.
 - o We accept where others are and encourage one another along the way.
- We cultivate a love of learning.
 - o We focus on intrinsic values, *i.e.*, what comes from the inside, rather than seeking extrinsic value from others.
 - o We strive to make connections, within a subject or across subjects, to concrete examples and to life experiences.
 - o We inspire in one another a sense of awe and wonder at what God is doing around us.
 - o We work hard to learn and grow, and delight in what we discover.
- We seek to grow in being prepared to be effective in the world around us.
 - o We work backwards from what we need as adults to figure out what skills and attitudes to develop.
 - o We strive to help one another think critically for ourselves.
 - o We help one another on a path of discovery rather than simply seeking pat answers.

Rather than simply holding ourselves up as models for students to follow, we seek to be transparent, and to reflect Christ.

"All those who are destined to teach others should constantly endeavor to divest themselves of self and put on Jesus Christ. For in general, things produce effects in proportion to their nature, and hence, if the person imparting the spirit and way of living to others is animated only by a human spirit, will they not be imbued with the same spirit and learn from him the appearance of virtue rather than the substance?"

- St. Vincent de Paul



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Evaluation

Helping students to excel, to reach their potential, and to find intrinsic value in learning are key goals. Promoting those goals involves providing feedback and regular communication.

- Specific feedback on the impactfulness and effectiveness of their work tends to be more helpful than a raw score
- Where work is objectively evaluable (correct or not), the quality of the work can be expressed quantitatively, e.g. +17 or -3 or 17/20.
- Letter grades can get misinterpreted as proxies for quality, e.g. “I just want to get an A,” in a way that distracts from the ultimate goals of learning. So we favor descriptive evaluation over just quantitative evaluation, and discourage assigning letter grades, on specific assignments and report cards.
- We do have a responsibility to other schools and universities to provide an objective quantification of student performance. So we do map our own performance criteria to letter grades on transcripts that the school provides upon request.
- It is helpful to have some grading consistency across subjects. The difficulty of tests and assignments can often be tuned to yield percentage scores in target ranges. To that end, you can think of the following typical scale when assigning percentage scores: 90% = A-, 80% = B-, 70% = C-, 60% = D-.
- The evaluation that’s given at the end of each semester considers each of the following: academic excellence, effort, and behavior. Effort includes what is expended both in and outside of class. Behavior includes charity, respectful communication, active engagement, and alignment with the goals of the school. Academic excellence may be evaluated through a combination of individual assignments and overall mastery of the subject by the end of the semester. Since the appropriate weighting of these factors may depend on the subject, it is left to the discretion of the teacher. It need not be driven by a strict formula. It should be designed to promote effective communication and striving for excellence.

Two skills to develop in preparation for adulthood are accountability and preparedness. To that end, we recommend some rather rigorous standards:

- The norm for the impact of turning in an assignment late is to lose 10% per calendar day past the due time.
- Accepting late assignments at all is up to the discretion of the teacher.
- Teachers can exercise some discretion for extraordinary circumstances. For example, if the student is sick during the school week for N days during which an item was due, the norm is to allow them to turn in the assignment N days late.

Learning from mistakes is part of life. Students may sometimes be given the opportunity to redo some or all of an assignment that they could significantly improve. Use of this “mastery” approach is up to the discretion of the teacher, since the utility of that approach and the availability of the teacher to reevaluate the work may vary. An example of a way to provide feedback on a paper that was already turned in would be to ask a student to outline the paper and compare it to a new outline of theirs that would make more effective arguments that fulfilled the assignment, so that they can compare and contrast the two.

Going Green

Where possible, we seek to be good stewards of our environment, and also to save costs. To that end, please minimize the number of paper copies made for distribution, and to encourage students to submit work online.



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Teacher policies

Commitments Related to Time

- Please be in the class room 5 minutes before class starts. If you are coming directly from teaching another class, please plan your breaks before or after the block of classes.
- Office hours
 - o We suggest that you post two hours a week as office hours during which you are available for non-urgent questions, in person or by phone.
 - o Monitor your school email account regularly for questions that are more urgent.
 - o Respond to emails from students, parents or the Board within one business day.
- Ongoing commitments
 - o 1.5 hours a month for faculty/parent Community of Learners meetings
 - o Brief weekly faculty meeting, which may be over the phone
 - o Be open to pitching in as you're able, in a spirit of service
 - o Class prep, grading; parents and students may share in some of the grading
 - o Teacher training

Other commitments

- Spiritual
 - o Exhibit the fruits of the Spirit, and serve as a Christian role model both in and out of school.
 - o Pray briefly with students at the start of each class; the prayer may be by you, it may be rote or it may be led by a student.
 - o Be open to the Spirit and to the direction of the school Board and others in growing together in our effectiveness as a community of learners.
- Instructional
 - o Foster critical thinking, lead students to discovery rather than simply giving them the answers.
 - o Help students make connections across different subjects.
 - o Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of and an interest in the subjects taught.
 - o Find creative ways to foster and maintains the student's active interest.
 - o Use clear language and vocabulary appropriate to the level of the students.
 - o Explain and connect the unfamiliar with what is already familiar to the students.
 - o Frequently review and apply material learned.
 - o Plan lessons in order to achieve curriculum goals, prepare and submit weekly **lesson plans a week and a half ahead**, so that it can be reviewed by the Board as necessary.
 - o Use a reasonable amount of work for home class and study, on the order of three to five hours a week, that effectively promotes internalization of the material.
 - o Promptly grade and provide constructive feedback on assignments.
 - o Communicate regularly with parents about progress and concerns.
 - o Know the needs, interests and learning characteristics of each student.
- Non-instructional
 - o Provide information necessary for a background check.
 - o Provide proof of having completed a "Protecting God's Students" program from VIRTUS, at the School's expense.
 - o Provide an orderly teaching environment by consistently enforcing class rules and the Code of Conduct.
 - o Cooperate with the school Board in implementing all policies, procedures and guidelines governing the operation of the school.



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- Maintain regular and accurate attendance, tardiness and evaluation records to meet the demands for a comprehensive knowledge of each student's progress.
- Make a reasonable effort to resolve discipline and other issues directly with the student, and involve the School board where necessary. Write up a student for violations of the code of conduct promptly, assist in the creation and implementation of a behavior improvement plan for that student.
- Keep students, parents and the Board adequately informed of academic and character concerns and give suggestions for improvement.
- Maintain a clean, attractive and well-ordered classroom.
- Maintain and use classroom materials and equipment in a cost-effective manner. Do not use copier and other equipment for personal use.
- Professional
 - Use open communication and show respect for all others.
 - Seek the counsel of the administrator, colleagues and parents.
 - Continually strive for excellence, growing in content knowledge and the art of teaching.
 - Provide input and recommendations for administrative and managerial functions in the school.
 - Respond in a timely and appropriate manner to requests from the Board.
 - Participate in scheduled faculty and committee meetings.
 - Demonstrate good stewardship of time, including the time of others, by being present at school for the contracted hours, being punctual for duties and starting and ending classes on time.
 - Project a positive professional and respectful attitude toward others, including students, parents, the school Board, faculty and staff.
 - Exercise proper discretion in matters such as confidential information and personal opinions or concerns about school operations, students or staff
- Personal
 - Maintain a personal appearance that is a role model of cleanliness, modesty and good taste.
 - Serve as a role model of charitable speech and clear articulation.
 - Develop and maintain rapport with students, parents and staff to promote a positive learning environment.

Absenteeism

- We understand that absences happen. Some are planned, some are unplanned.
- We are open to cases where teachers may team teach, by prior arrangement and agreement.
- If at all possible, please arrange your own subs, and work out your own arrangements to compensate your substitute. Substitutes shall be pre-approved by the Board.
- If you are unable to get a sub, which is considered an "uncovered class," please let the Board know as soon as possible, and at least by 7am that morning.
- The policy is to allow up to 2 uncovered days per semester per class. Beyond 2 days, compensation gets proportionally docked at the rate of 1.25x per class.
- Attendance will be considered as a performance issue, positive or negative



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Compensation

- Teachers are independent contractors. This means that they pay both sides of Social Security.
- The school offers no benefits, but our Lord has a great eternal benefits plan.
- Payments will happen from the school's checking account, targeted to arrive on 15th and last days of the month. Payments are made at the end of a full pay period, rather than any fractional periods at the beginning of the semester.
- Pay is prorated across 34 weeks, so the total for the semester will be lower in the fall, which has fewer weeks, than in the spring, which has more weeks. Holidays, as indicated on the school calendar, don't affect this normal cycle of payments.
- Some people may get bonuses for exceptional contributions to the goals of the school.
- Teachers may enroll their students in Veritas Christi Hybrid Academy, but are not required to do so. By law, teachers who are compensated may not receive any tuition benefits, so teachers whose contracted compensation exceeds the cost of tuition and fees for their students will be paid in full, and will need to pay tuition and fees separately. Teachers whose contracted compensation would be less than the cost of tuition and fees for their students may choose to volunteer for no pay, and to pay the balance of tuition and fees, less the credit toward what they would have been compensated. Registration costs need to be paid, regardless of the credit amount. The normal schedule for the payments of the balance of tuition and fees still applies, unless there is an alternate written agreement with the Board.

What Veritas Christi Hybrid pays for

- Teacher's copy of books and/or teacher's manual
- Teaching materials - agreed upon before semester starts
- Teacher training: transportation, lodging; meals may be on your own
- Minimal copies, e.g. for tests and labs – see the “Going Green” section

Structure

- Mechanisms
 - o Teacher posts all materials online: syllabi, detailed lesson plans, tests, assignments
 - o All posts are time stamped, for self-accountability
- Timing
 - o Course description is available the semester before the class starts
 - o Detailed syllabus available two weeks before class
 - o Detailed lesson plan, with homework assignments, published at least by Sunday night for classes the following week (1.5 weeks ahead). Homework can be updated up to the day assigned.
- Communication and access to the web documents
 - o Access will be managed separately for teachers, parents and students
 - o All will be able to see assignments
 - o Students can post their completed assignments online
 - o Students will be able to check off completion, parents will be able to review that, and teachers will be able to see that.
 - o Teachers and parents can communicate online about progress, strengths and development areas
- We'll offer a guide to specific mechanisms that the school provides, and will ease the transition to using them as much as possible.

