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## Latin is Not Dead at Mount Mercy

Schools in New York State are dropping the classical language Latin due to the mistaken belief that there is no practical application of studying Latin since it is no longer spoken. combined with a difficulty of finding qualified teachers. However, under the tutelage of Catherine Nicastro, the language is alive, well and thriving at Mount Mercy Academy. Nicastro, a member of three different professional organizations, has been teaching Latin at Mount Mercy for the past two years.

Nicastro is quick to tout the benefits of studying Latin. She feels that the study of Latin improves literacy and vocabulary as well as improves logical thinking skills. Another asset gained by learning Latin is that the language is the basis of the five Romance Languages (Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Romanian, and French), making it easier to learn these languages. Nicastro also believes that Latin gives students perspective on why Western Culture is the way it is and it also teaches about the origin of traditions, customs and phrases that are still utilized today.

The study of Latin is not a path that many pursue but Nicastro has always been interested in ancient history and her love of Latin was sparked by a wonderful teacher she had when she was in eighth grade at Orchard Park Middle School. This spark led her to the University of Buffalo for a dual major in Classical Language and Literature and Archeology. Her areas of concentration were Greek and Latin. Nicastro then obtained her Masters Degree in Education, with a concentration in Latin. She belongs to the Classical Association of Western New York Latin Teachers (CAWNY), the Classical Association of the Empire State (CAES) and the Virgilian Society.

"I really enjoy all the extras that are involved in teaching Latin," Nicastro commented. "I am able to take students to competitions and I am able to bring in outside experiences that I gain through travelling."

One extra that Nicastro has brought to the students of Mount Mercy Academy is membership in the Junior Classical League. The Junior Classical League is a national youth organization for Latin students. It is a youth version, for middle and high school students of the American Classical League. Nicastro became involved with the league in 2013 when she brought students to the state convention and was then asked by the state leaders to chaperone New York's participants in the National Event. After that positive experience, she was elected as the state co-chairman, a position that involves taking New York Latin students to the Nationals each year.

More than twenty Mount Mercy students are registered as members of both the New York State and National Junior Classical Leagues. The students got their first exposure to the Junior League this November. Nicastro is hopeful that a few students will travel to the Nationals this year.

The New York State Junior Classical League holds two events each year, with activities that are comparable to the National competitions. A major activity is the *Certamen*, a quiz bowl-like contest. Academic tests, chess tournaments and board games are some of the other state level activities. After competing in the state events, students are able to proceed to the National Competition. In addition to the events that occurred at the state level, the Nationals offer a week of competition. Students stay on a college campus in the dormitories and participate in activities that are all run by the high school students. New events at the National level are Olympic style athletic competitions in track and swimming, as well as in team sports. There are also competitions in oratory and sight reading, as well as costume creation.

Nicastro is adamant in her beliefs that students should study Latin. She feels that studying Latin has made her a much better writer, a more eloquent speaker, it has add enabled her to better

understand the English language and it has made it easier to learn other languages. She is fluent in Greek and proficient in both Spanish and Italian.

Mount Mercy Academy, a Catholic College Preparatory High School for young women is fortunate to have Catherine Nicastro as a member of its faculty.



### **Mount Mercy Academy**

A Catholic College Preparatory High School for Young Women

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