



# PROFILE FRIDAY: FACULTY

BEN PETERSON - LATIN TEACHER

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As a student at Oregon City High School, Ben Peterson developed a fondness for language arts which never quite left him. He entered college at the University of Oregon with the intention of majoring in psychology and started to drift away from the romance languages. It only took one Latin course for Ben to reconnect with his high school passion and decide that his future was in studying classic literature.

"I found Latin to be useful and rewarding. The next year I signed up for Greek, Ancient Philosophy and Ancient History courses — all taught by some of the greatest instructors I've ever met. My sophomore year of college, a course in 20th century literature prompted me to declare English Literature as a second major," Ben said.

Ben graduated from University of Oregon in 2004 with a double major in Latin and English Literature. Following graduation, Ben took a year off to travel the Mediterranean and prepare for graduate school. He returned to Eugene in 2005, earned an MA in Classics in 2007 then spent more time traveling abroad to Laos and Vietnam. After returning from abroad, Ben accepted a position in Monroe Township, New Jersey teaching high school Latin. He taught Latin for three years and was given the opportunity to primarily teach language arts for the next four years.

"When I teach Latin we do some speaking in class — enough to allow students to experiment with the language a bit. Generally, I try to focus on any connections that will allow students to connect to Latin and Roman culture. So we trace etymologies of commonly-used English phrases, look at Roman graffiti for a few slang terms, Roman entertainment and the beginnings of spectator sport and mythological stories which seem to find their way into a lot of our modern pop culture. Beyond that, we have a lot of memorization to accomplish, so we reinforce the learning any way we can through performance, art, competition and debate," Ben said.

After seven years away from the Pacific Northwest, Ben and his wife decided to travel back to the west coast. Ben will begin his first year of teaching Latin at St. Mary's Academy this Septemeber. He taught a creative writing course during the 2014 SMA Summer Program.

While many might view Latin as a dead language, Ben hopes to capitalize on shifting attitudes and technology, especially in how he teaches the subject in the classroom and engages students.

"Latin is finally catching up with technology a bit. There are more and more apps and websites designed to help with the acquisition of the language, tour virtual models of Ancient Rome, design and dress your own Roman family, and create-your-own mythological beasts," said Ben.



## Interview with Ben Peterson

**SMA: Why did you choose SMA?**

**BP:** St. Mary's has an excellent reputation for developing not only smart and academically successful graduates, but also morally and ethically-sound human beings. Every St. Mary's alumna I've met has displayed the rarest forms of kindness, grace and focus. I can't wait to contribute to such a worthwhile legacy.

**SMA: What are you most looking forward to experiencing in your new position as Latin teacher at St. Mary's Academy?**

**BP:** Watching a new group of students connect their world to a far-reaching and ancient tradition.

**SMA: What was your favorite academic subject in high school?**

**BP:** I loved Language Arts — even the totally boring stuff like Edith Wharton and Jane Austen, I read it all. My favorite teachers were always Language Arts instructors — veteran teachers who dug deep in the texts, helped us create meaning and shape to our thoughts.

**SMA: What are your favorite hobbies/sports?**

**BP:** My favorite hobby is reading. I will read anything — novels, comics, essays, poetry, grocery lists. I reserve a spot in each day for reading and writing. My favorite sport to play is soccer (less and less as I grow older), snowboarding, any leisure sport like bowling, darts or pool and recently boxing. My favorite sport to watch is hockey. The first time I visited Madison Square Garden, I was hooked. There's such great energy, pace, and toughness in the sport — it's easy to get sucked in. I don't miss a single tilt of the NY Rangers' 82 game season.

**SMA: What book changed your life and why?**

**BP:** Let's start with the Hardy Boys series. My bookshelves were packed with those little blue and gold volumes and, to this day, I'm a total sucker for detective fiction. But I will have to say that Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" completely changed the arc of my education and career. Late in my sophomore year in college, after taking a long hiatus from fiction, I remember reading the last line of this book, closing the back cover and staring at the ceiling for a good long while. That book, at that particular time in my life, spoke to something so vital and intangible about the human experience. I began reading again and added English as a second major, which eventually matured into a rewarding career teaching Language Art, alongside Latin.