

Mission of the Department of Education

The following mission statement has for many years guided the work of the Education Department at Westmont:

Within the Christian liberal arts context, the Westmont teacher education program strives to develop reflective teachers who meet the needs of all learners through integrated and balanced instruction, who embrace the moral dimensions of teaching, and who desire to grow professionally.

The paragraphs that follow serve to unpack themes and emphases in the mission statement, and to relate these to the larger institutional context.

The Liberal Arts Context:

Academic and personal preparation befitting a complex profession

Central to the work of the department, consistent with the context introduced above, and consistent with major documents on the education of teachers, is the belief that effective professional practice grows out of a rigorous liberal and humanistic education (*A Nation Prepared*, 1986; NCTAF, 2003; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005). Although teacher preparation includes the development of specific professional knowledge, skills, and habits of mind, we recognize that such professional preparation rests on larger educational foundations. Especially given the complexity of our 21st-century world and the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the teaching profession itself, we do not wish to approach the task of preparing teachers in a narrowly technical manner.

Four specific ideals associated with the notion of a liberal education and which guide our efforts in the Multiple and Single Subject Credential Programs, in addition to our administration of the Liberal Studies major, are as follows.

1. We are committed to developing future teachers as whole persons, multi-dimensional human beings whose moral, aesthetic, and interpersonal sensitivities have been developed along with their intellectual skills and perspectives. In the Multiple Subjects program, in particular, this commitment is expressed in our challenge to candidates (insofar as it is within their power) to offer even elementary students a well-rounded “liberal arts,” curriculum. At a time when education is so often reduced in practice to instruction in the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, we challenge candidates to strive to offer students experiences in the arts, science, history, and the moral dimensions of life.
2. A central preoccupation of the liberal arts tradition is developing critical/appreciative lenses on the world, including critical lenses on one’s self and one’s own assumptions. In the Westmont education program, similarly, we emphasize habits of critical reflection on current K-12 practice, on their own K-12 experience, on their education at Westmont itself, and their own emerging professional practice.

3. Related to the above, we emphasize in our professional preparation the traditional liberal arts value of seeing situations from multiple perspectives. We remind candidates frequently to see situations from the point of view of individual parents, fellow educators, administrators, and students; as well as the habit of seeing situations from the perspective of other cultural groups. Our professional courses that deal with culturally-responsive pedagogy are building, then, on a larger academic foundation of acknowledging and legitimating multiple cultures, and multiple ways of perceiving and interacting with the world.

4. In keeping with time-honored traditions of liberal learning, we continually emphasize with candidates the skills of oral and written communication. Oral communication in particular is stressed throughout the Westmont program, including frequent opportunities for peer teaching.

Other core beliefs pertinent to the preparation of teachers:

The following beliefs of the Westmont Education faculty serve to flesh out and extend the statement of mission and statement concerning the centrality of a liberal education, above.

- 1) Teaching is an extraordinarily complex and demanding profession, and necessitates a high level of personal commitment and engagement accordingly. As a program, then, we do not apologize for insisting on a high level of commitment and focus from our candidates throughout their professional preparation. In recognition of the complexity of teaching, we emphasize the need for constant attentiveness, imagination, openness to new approaches, and a problem-solving disposition in a role for which often there are no universal prescriptions or black-and-white rules (Darling-Hammond & Bratz-Snowden, 2005; Broudy, 1980, in Howey & Zimpher, 1989; Ayers, 2001; Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Labaree, 2004).
- 2) Teaching is a collaborative and communal enterprise. Throughout the program, we emphasize that learning and teaching are done in community. This applies both to the process of teacher education, and to the teaching and learning that our candidates will facilitate in their own classrooms. Candidates are expected to learn from one another, to assist one another through peer critique and peer coaching, both giving and receiving constructive criticism in a gracious and professional manner. In emphasizing the role of peers in growing professionally, we strive to develop habits of collaboration that candidates will display throughout their working lives (Palmer, 1998; NCTAF, 2003).
- 3) Teaching is a deeply personal and human enterprise. Although there is an emerging knowledge base about teaching and learning, ultimately it is not simply propositional knowledge or the implementation of discrete, disconnected skill-sets

that lead to instructional effectiveness. The teacher as a whole person is a major factor in his or her impact for good and ill. The teacher's personal character and professional dispositions are thus critical elements to be considered in preparing for teaching (Palmer, 1998). Teaching is in part an act of effective, informed, and holistic human caring (Noddings, 2005). Narrative accounts of teaching that provide compelling personal models for candidates—including not only traditional published narratives (e.g., Ashton-Warner, 1963; Kidder, 1989; Gruwell, 2007) but also our own narratives and those of our graduates, are instrumental in helping to inform candidates as to the nature of teaching and to inspire them to bring their entire person and individual personality to the task of teaching (Schubert and Ayers, 1992; Costigan and Crocco, 2004).

- 4) Teaching is inherently a moral enterprise. As Hansen (in Richardson, 2001) has expressed it, *“moral matters do not have to be imported into the classroom as if teaching were itself devoid of moral significance...Rather the activity of teaching is itself saturated with moral significance...Teaching comprises infinitely varied acts that are bound up with familiar and desirable qualities of human relation: being patient with others, attentive to them, respectful of them, open-minded to their views, and so forth.”* In keeping with larger institutional ideals, above, we challenge our candidates to recognize and confront issues of respect, justice, equity, and to be instruments of redemption for individuals and their families, schools, and larger societal systems.
- 5) Teaching is learned in large part by doing—along with appropriate reflection on the same (Schon, 1995). Wherever possible in our program, we emphasize preparation for teaching by actual teaching. In addition to traditional field experience and applications, candidates are given relatively extensive opportunities in their own Westmont classes to practice their instructional skills through teaching professional knowledge and skills to one another. Candidates are continually challenged to reflect on their practice, to set professional goals, and to demonstrate continuous improvement.
- 6) In preparing candidates for effective teaching, we want to be mindful always that content and pedagogical content knowledge are critical—and all too often neglected—components in becoming a professional educator (Borrowman, 1956; Sedlak, in Soltis, 1987; Mullen, 2002; Labaree, 2004; Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005). We want our candidates and graduates to be fully familiar with state academic content standards pertinent to their field, and familiar with appropriate commercial curriculum materials. At the same time, we encourage them constantly to exercise their critical thinking skills, to be active shapers of curriculum rather than passive agents of what others have constructed.
- 7) Even as we introduce candidates to scholarly perspectives on teaching and the larger social ecology of educational systems, preparation for teaching must be aligned as much as possible with the real world (Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993). Throughout our program, we remind candidates

- of the realities of contemporary California and contemporary Santa Barbara. We emphasize the need for teachers to work within and in partnership with larger school cultures, including formal and covert structures of governance. Relative to many programs, we spend a disproportionate amount of time as faculty members in local schools, and constantly refer in our teaching to the challenges of implementation in the particular context of our state and local schools (Wisniewski & Ducharme, 1989). Relative to many programs, we emphasize practical strategies, procedures, and ideas for immediate application (e.g., Wong and Wong, 2004).
- 8) Related to the above, we believe strongly that effective classroom management is a major component in effective teaching, especially at the beginning of a teacher's career. We introduce approaches to classroom management early in candidate's professional preparation and build on this foundation throughout candidates' program (Darling-Hammond & Bratz-Snowden, 2005; Charles, 2005).
 - 9) We want our candidates and graduates consistently to be characterized as valuing and responding positively to diversity and exceptionality. Particularly in a city and county where over half of the public school enrollment is Latino, and where a significant share of the school population are English Language Learners, we are relentless in insisting on the need to make instruction routinely accessible and meaningful for students for whom English is not the first or primary language (California Department of Education, 1999; Cary, 2000). Continually we remind candidates to be attentive to the multiple and subtle ways in which their lenses on the world may or may not conform to the lenses of their students, families, or fellow educators (Valdes, 1996; Payne, 2005).
 - 10) Even as we develop in candidates critical lenses on schools and teachers, and a commitment to on-going reform, we also want to value practitioner wisdom and emphasize the importance for candidates of a teachable spirit (Jackson, 1990; Kagan, 1993). While we believe our graduates are equipped to participate in bringing society's ideals more and more to fruition in the nation's schools, we encourage our candidates and beginning teachers initially to appreciate and understand how veteran teachers might approach an issue, rather than encouraging an attitude of judging or superiority.
 - 11) As part of candidates' preparation for a pluralistic society, we want to value in our own program an openness to diverse professional orientations and emphases. We do not want there to be a single ideological litmus test that all professors have to conform to in order to teach in, or contribute to, the program.
 - 12) In a world where there is an increasing demand for professional decisions to be based on clear data, we are committed to equipping candidates for the regular and responsible use of assessment to inform instruction.

13) Finally, and less explicit in the current professional literature but important to articulate nonetheless, is the following. We want to sustain as one of our continuing hallmarks our emphasis on the critical role of personal coaching and mentoring in candidates' overall preparation. Thus again, our commitment that all supervision be carried out by full-time faculty, and a corresponding commitment to work one-on-one with candidates wherever needed to call out their personal and professional best.