
What Is Westmont?

Westmont is a liberal arts college, and classically so. Our single, overriding objective is to launch our students into a lifetime of flourishing, so that they might become the people God created them to be. We prepare our students for life – the whole of it – enabling them to follow God’s call into any career, any avenue of service, that is suited to their gifts and abilities.

What do we hope for our students? Simply this: that they would follow Christ, becoming like him in character and affections, loving God and neighbor with heart, mind, soul and strength, and responding to his call in their lives to be faithful stewards of all that God has given to them.

And what should distinguish a Westmont graduate? Loving to learn, they are people whose learning is inspired by their love of God. Learning to live, their practices and habits are shaped by what they have learned. Living to love, their love of God and neighbor is evident in how they live their lives. These are our aspirations for our students, and this is what we believe our fragmented world desperately needs.

Christ Preeminent in All Things. To understand Westmont is to understand its motto – Christ Preeminent in All Things. We affirm with the Apostle Paul that "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." Therefore, we do not begin with our knowledge about ourselves, but the revelation of Christ, who is the foundation for all knowing, all understanding, all wisdom. As God’s image bearers, we know in part. As fallen beings, we also know that we are easily deceived in our understanding. Reconciliation with God through Christ, therefore, is not only our future hope, but the ground in which our liberal learning must be rooted.

We believe that Jesus Christ – Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer of all things – is present in all spheres of life, both to call us into relation with Himself and to challenge us to make him Lord. We are persuaded that the Christian faith, revealed to us in the Scriptures and realized in us by the Holy Spirit, provides the most promising framework within which to pursue an education. At Westmont, we believe that we can invest ourselves fully in every undertaking, with the confidence that in so doing, we will encounter the person of Christ. We will also come to understand more fully God’s purposes in the world, and to honor His call upon us to participate in them.

Loving to Learn. As a liberal arts college, Westmont exists primarily to cultivate the love of learning. If the fulfillment of Christian discipleship consists in learning both to appreciatively recognize and to faithfully honor God’s preeminence in all things, then education becomes a source of both personal enjoyment and communion with Christ. Therefore, the goal of a liberal education at Westmont is to stimulate growth in our ability to appreciate and to care for the wonders of God’s Creation and the treasures of human cultures. Because we believe the undergraduate years represent a crucial opportunity for transition into adult pleasures and responsibilities, we focus exclusively on undergraduate learning: our teaching, our curriculum, our research, and our cocurricular programs are designed to provide an optimum context for the growth and development of undergraduates.

Learning to Live. At Westmont, we believe that all true learning brings with it the responsibility to live differently as a result of what we understand. In fact, authentic learning cannot occur unless it involves not only cognitive understanding, but also personal experience and active response. We seek to educate the whole person through an integrated program of curricular instruction, co-curricular opportunities, and thoughtfully designed residential environment. The residential character of the college invites students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives to apply their studies to the daily task of creating a community in which individuals can grow and mature together. But communities are not simply testing grounds for our learning. They are also themselves a source of learning. The very context of living in community – of learning to value others as Christ values them – brings with it questions and challenges that drive us back to learning.

Living to Love. At Westmont, we believe education must reflect the gospel's paradox that the ultimate end of human existence is not just learning to enrich our own lives, but growing in our ability to expend them in love for the sake of that which is other than ourselves. Thus, learning to live redemptively is not limited to the campus context. We seek to inspire a sense of God's call and His purposes for the entire world, and not simply for our own lives. We want to be characterized by a large vision of the gospel, one that celebrates all dimensions of human existence, one that addresses the full range of ways in which the earth and its people have felt the impact of the fall, and might be healed by the power of the gospel. In short, we want to be faithful stewards of the gifts of grace that have come to us in our education. And we want our lives to be a prayer of grateful response to those gifts.

A Brief History. The history of Westmont began in Los Angeles in 1937 with the establishment of the Bible Missionary Institute (later renamed the Western Bible College). In 1940 Ruth Kerr and the other founders realized that a liberal arts curriculum was the best direction for the school. The college was renamed Westmont, and Dr. Wallace Emerson, the first president, envisioned a Christian college that would rival the best colleges in the nation, and he set an important direction for the new college.

By 1944, Westmont had outgrown its facilities in Los Angeles. The search for a new campus led Mrs. Kerr and the trustees to the former Dwight Murphy estate in Montecito with its 125 acres and beautiful Mediterranean house. Westmont purchased this property and moved to the Santa Barbara area in 1945.

Set in the foothills of the Santa Ynez Mountains, Westmont's wooded and scenic acres provide a beautiful environment for a residential college. The campus includes buildings and land from two former estates and the historic Deane School for Boys. The grounds still feature the pathways, stone bridges, and garden atmosphere typical of Montecito, a lovely suburb of Santa Barbara.

While Westmont has sought to preserve and use the original structures, it has also built new facilities, including the Roger John Voskuyl Library which contains approximately 150,000 volumes, the newly restored Westmont Art Center, the Whittier Science Building with state-of-the-art equipment for the biology and chemistry departments, the Murchison Gymnasium Complex, and the Ruth Kerr Memorial Student Center.

In the 1980s, Westmont received increasing recognition as an outstanding Christian college of the liberal arts and sciences. *U.S. News and World Report* listed it as one of the top ten regional liberal arts colleges in the nation in 1985. The Carnegie Commission ranks Westmont in the Liberal Arts I category, which includes 160 "highly selective" institutions across the nation. A recent article in the *Bulletin* of the American Association of Higher Education reprinted from *The College Board Review* suggests that Westmont may be the only truly Liberal Arts I college among the many fine evangelical Christian institutions in California. The College appeared in the 1988 edition of *Best Buys in College Education*, a guide that features only 200 schools nationwide.

In 1997, the college celebrated 60 years of growth in this distinctive and consistent heritage. As an institution, we have come of age, and we offer an effective model of education for a new generation of men and women who apply their competency and their personal Christian faith to the challenge and complexity of today's world.