

WESTMONT COLLEGE STATEMENT OF KEY TERMS AND IDENTITY

What does Westmont mean by describing itself as an *evangelical, liberal arts* college committed to *diversity*?

In order to help all members of the college communicate Westmont's mission and identity more precisely and effectively, the Strategic Planning Committee (2007-present) recommended the college draft brief statements **to sharpen and focus our grasp of these terms and encourage a continuing community dialog to promote a common understanding of the college's identity.** The purpose is not to *restrict* discussion of Westmont to "evangelical," "liberal arts" or "diversity" because the college's mission and vision involve many more aspects than these three. Nevertheless, they rank among the features at the heart of Westmont's character, and they have a variety of possible meanings, roles and connotations. So it's worth considering how the college understands them and their relationship to the institution.

Westmont takes these three terms so seriously because they are matters of faithfulness and discipleship to its mission. Because they go to the heart of the college's identity, they cannot be independent of one another. Rather, each of these commitments has energized and shaped the others in the college's community life and history. Westmont's core mission originally was evangelical and has remained so. Collegiate education in the liberal arts quickly became the trustees' means to achieving that mission. The shape and fruit of that means emerged as, among other things, an embrace of the Kingdom of God's rich diversity and a longing for its even fuller expression. In turn, deepening appreciation of this diversity — of the variety and connectedness of one another as well as our disciplines and walks of life — has been inspiring and retraining Westmont's academic disciplines, educational goals and strategies, and evangelical perspectives. To the extent the college *becomes* more fully evangelical, more steeped in the liberal arts and more richly diverse, it will *be* more "Westmont." To understand these terms better, then, is to comprehend the college's community and task more truly.

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Diversity

Learning at Westmont is not merely a matter of facts and skills. It also includes practicing the virtues of humility, self-examination and repentance. By committing its students, faculty and constituencies to this hard work, Westmont animates its mission with an eschatological vision of a whole, restored world that draws us forward toward more godly ways of learning, living and loving. Living with and learning from each other is absolutely central to our mission and identity as an evangelical, liberal arts college.

Recognizing that evangelical colleges have historically lacked ethnic and racial diversity, increasing such diversity has been an explicit goal at Westmont for the last 20 years. In addition, the college encourages students to develop a greater awareness of and engagement with global diversity. With these priorities, the college expects its graduates to:

- Gain the understanding and skills to engage individuals and groups unlike themselves in ways that affirm others as persons created in God's image.
- Approach others respectfully and avoid the natural tendency to deal with differences by vilifying, romanticizing or victimizing.

In purely educational terms, diversity in curricular offerings, in the student body, and among faculty and staff, is strongly linked to educational effectiveness. Beyond the value of diversity for educational effectiveness, however, Westmont grounds its commitment to diversity in a biblical vision of God's kingdom. Bearing witness to this kingdom is in itself an act of restorative justice. Living toward this kingdom in our daily lives requires personal and communal sanctification.

Westmont welcomes all to the table, acknowledging that understanding and celebrating difference is a critical avenue to knowing God and being liberally educated persons. The celebration of difference needs to grow out of a deep understanding of the histories of each individual and ethnicity. It's not simply a quick and easy enjoyment of food and culture. Rather, it requires individuals to be willing to step outside of their own cultural framework and experience to begin to understand another person. This process happens in relationship and through experience and requires those who grow in understanding to be advocates for those who have been misunderstood. It's essential that our campus climate empowers and encourages all to contribute their unique voice to the conversation.

At Westmont, we hold in healthy tension the celebration of difference and the bond we share in Christ, believing that it allows us the freedom to fully share our differences. The challenges related to our differences are part of our fallen nature, and we have a God who desires to redeem His people that we might more fully reflect His person, whole and complete, deep and diverse, creative and growing.

Westmont

An institution's true identity emerges over a specific history rather than from a committee's imagination or aspirations. The words used to summarize it — including the three terms treated here — are rarely adequate even when they're accurate. Moreover, Christian identity is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who calls, restores and equips us uniquely for service in the eternal kingdom by Statement of grace and not our own achievement. Westmont has forged its identity over decades spent pursuing a particular vision of Christian education, which shapes our institution and guides our future.

This legacy is as much caught as taught, as much shown as said. The lives and testimonies of individuals in the college community best express it. Nevertheless, it shows up in describable ways such as Westmont's five distinctives: *Christian, liberal arts, undergraduate, residential* and *global*. Alumni report that the college fosters an environment of spiritual and intellectual confidence that prepares graduates to engage and investigate openly rather than constricting imaginations and communicating defensiveness or insecurity. Because the college is *centered* on Jesus Christ, it's *open* to surprising signs of his Lordship, and vice versa. The curriculum frees and trains the community to think more deeply *and* holistically, more critically *and* appreciatively, more traditionally *and* creatively. Commitments, traditions, a unique location and its small size shape Westmont's character as a genuine *community* of faith, education and the world. The college both sustains its commitments and exercises genuine gratitude, hospitality and candor toward those who may not fully share them, including them whenever possible. Learning, worshipping, eating, living and traveling together produce mutuality, grace, understanding, accountability and growth uncommon in many collegiate settings. Faculty appreciate students' earnestness and their willingness to invest impressive levels of time and hard work in class, athletics and service for God's glory and the benefit of others.

“Not that [we] have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at [our] goal” (Philippians 3:12 TNIV)! Westmont falls short of its mission and goals. Nevertheless, even its challenges and failures have helped refine the college. Through them God has helped Westmont glimpse a vision of what it could be: a stronger, fuller and more discerning institution of faithful learning and learned faith. This encourages staff, students and supporters to continue pursuing a mission that offers such hope and potential for the future.

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