

WHAT “DIVERSITY” MEANS TO WESTMONT

At its October meetings, the Board of Trustees approved a statement of key terms and identity. This culminated a lengthy campus effort spearheaded by the Mission and Distinctiveness Task Force and the Strategic Planning Committee to define what Westmont means by “evangelical,” “liberal arts,” and “diversity.”

According to this statement, “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.” Included below is the section on “diversity.”

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.

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR DIVERSITY

Acting Provost Rick Pointer is leading an effort to develop a written statement that roots or grounds Westmont’s valuing of diversity in explicit biblical and theological terms. Those working with Dr. Pointer on this project are professors Alister Chapman, Robert Gundry, Maurice Lee, Tremper Longman, Randy VanderMey and Telford Work; Director of Intercultural Programs, Elena Yee; President Gayle Beebe; and trustee Roy Goble.

According to Dr. Pointer, this group will “make a biblical and theological ‘case’ for appreciating diversity in the 21st century. Its work will extend to wrestling fully with what scripture suggests about a number of forms of diversity.”