Philosophy of Education

The mission of Westmont College is to provide a high quality undergraduate liberal arts program in a residential campus community that assists college men and women toward a balance of rigorous intellectual competence, healthy personal development, and strong Christian commitments.

Liberal Arts. As a liberal arts college, Westmont seeks to help its students become certain kinds of people, not mere repositories of information or mere possessors of professional skills. Where such information and competencies are acquired, it is to be done in an intellectual and social context that nourishes a larger spiritual vision and is integrated with it. Crucially, as a liberal arts college, Westmont seeks to help inculcate those skills that contribute to leading a successful and satisfying life. For just as one must be trained in the skills that enable one to engage in a trade, so one must be trained in those skills that enable one to engage in the distinctively human activities of reasoning, communicating, thoughtfully choosing one’s moral and spiritual ends, building political, economic and spiritual communities, and entering into those “appreciative pleasures” that require knowledge, experience, and trained discrimination. Herein lies the relationship between liberal learning and life, for these are the very skills that translate into performing well one’s role as citizen of the state, servant of the church, member of a family, worker or professional and participant in the cultural world.

Christian. Westmont College is committed to the universal truths of the Christian faith, to a high view of biblical authority and an orthodox doctrinal vision, and to the central importance of a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is this Christian faith that the college seeks to integrate fully into its life as a liberal arts institution. For the pursuit of a liberal arts education, with its emphasis on producing certain kinds of people and inculcating certain basic human skills essential for living a satisfactory life, cannot take place in isolation from one’s most basic commitments and beliefs. For the Christian, then, this means bringing one’s biblical and theological heritage to this educational enterprise. Indeed, to have basic values and commitments that one cannot explicitly and systematically bring to this task is to have an education that is severely truncated, severed, as it were, from one’s most important beliefs and values. To isolate one’s worldview in this way, while pursuing an education, will only result in a worldview uninformed by sustained intellectual reflection. Such an approach will yield persons who are not fully educated, indeed not educated at the core of their being. For the Christian, therefore, higher education must be Christian education, if it is to be education for the whole person. At Westmont, then, Christian faith is to inform the academic enterprise and the academic enterprise is to inform one’s Christian faith and thus yield a Christian worldview that is biblically based and intellectually sound.

Undergraduate. Westmont is an undergraduate college and as such directs its attention, focuses its resources and devises its pedagogical strategies to facilitate the development of students who are beginning their post-secondary education. It follows that the primary emphasis at Westmont is on teaching. But teaching often involves helping students to acquire research skills and to become themselves producers of knowledge. This can be done effectively only as faculty model research skills for students, and mentor them in the acquisition of those skills. Moreover, to create a vital intellectual environment profitable for undergraduate students, Westmont must be an institution where knowledge is generated as well as transmitted. But producing such knowledge is to be largely (though not exclusively) evaluated and appreciated in terms of the benefits that accrue, directly or indirectly, to those undergraduates who have come to Westmont to receive their education. For it is those students that the educational programs at Westmont are dedicated.

Residential. The educational programs of Westmont College are residential in character and reflect a commitment to facilitate and exploit the ways in which education occurs within community. Indeed, ever since the monastic tradition, learning has been cultivated and transmitted within residential communities, enabling learning to be promoted by the joys of shared exploration and the sustenance of spiritual kinship. Moreover, both the Christian and liberal arts traditions remind us of the integrity of human wholeness; we cannot be neatly compartmentalized into rational, spiritual and affective components. The residential character allows and encourages expression of this wholeness as we live, learn and worship together. Further, the residential character of the college reflects the conviction that the goal of all meaningful learning, and of biblical education in particular, is to inform the way we live. The residential character of the college invites students to apply their studies to the daily task of creating a community in
which individuals can grow and mature together. Students are able to cultivate these patterns of adulthood and redemptive living in the presence of role models and mentors who can help them in this process.

Global. Westmont is to be a college with global concerns. For the earth and all its peoples are God’s good creation. As such, they must be appropriately valued and respected. We are called in scripture to be stewards of the earth, to be faithful caretakers of the physical creation. We are also called to appreciate the rich diversity of human cultures – cultures shaped by people who bear the mark of God’s image in creation. We are, then to be a community informed and enriched by thoughtful and intentional study of and interaction with cultures other than our own. Ours is, however, a fallen world, and the earth, its peoples, and their institutions stand in need of the redemptive, reconciling word of the gospel. We are called, therefore, not only to appreciate and preserve the creation and human cultures, but also to participate in the work of the Kingdom in response to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations – to bring all creation and human institutions under the Lordship of Christ. This task involves grappling with the full range of ways in which the fall has introduced blindness, disintegration, conflict, and injustice into the world. Finally, the emphasis on the global nature of education is a recognition that our world has increasingly become interconnected and interdependent. To prepare people to function intelligently, effectively and for the good in a world of global politics, global economics, and global communications must be one of the aims of a Westmont education.

Statement of Faith. The purpose of Westmont is to provide an education of the highest quality within a committed Christian environment, to encourage students to relate all they learn to the Christian faith, and to provide resources for the continued growth of their personal relationships with Jesus Christ. Achieving these goals is not automatic, even with Christian faculty and staff. The task requires a clear strategy which involves the entire College.

The basis of this strategy at Westmont is an understanding of the growth and development of college students, and the relationship between the development of faith and that of our intellect and emotions. The College constantly strives to provide adequate freedom for students to critically examine their faith, to learn about other competing systems of values, and to make their own decisions about the way they live their lives.

To balance this freedom, Westmont continually seeks to improve the quality and attractiveness of its Christian environment. College officials have established clear priorities in the recruitment of faculty whose personal relationship with Christ is basic to their lives, and who are enthusiastic about sharing their faith and themselves with their students.

The stance of the College toward the world in which we live should serve as a model for individual Christians. We seek to move out as a community into the Santa Barbara area with interest in local issues and concern for the betterment of our society. At the same time, we witness without apology to Jesus Christ as our personal Savior.

The College believes it is essential for its faculty, administration, and trustees to be committed to the authority of Scripture and to the basics of the Christian faith. All faculty, trustees, and administrative staff of the College declare themselves annually to believe:

—The Bible, composed of the Old and New Testaments, is the Word of God, a divine, supernatural revelation. We believe in the plenary, verbal inspiration of the original writings of the Scriptures, and that as thus given they were wholly without error of any kind.

—in one Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (I Peter 1:2; Matthew 28:19). We believe that they are co-equal in power and glory, identical in their essential nature, attributes, and perfections and that they are co-eternal (Genesis 1:2; John 17:5). In His essential nature God is spirit as opposed to material (John 4:24); as to His essential attributes God is absolutely holy, embracing the sum of all moral perfections (I Peter 1:16); as to His essential character, God is love (I John 4:16; John 3:16).

—that Jesus Christ “being the eternal Son of God became man” (Hebrews 2:16; John 1:14; Luke 1:35), and that He continues to be the God-Man in two distinct natures, and one person forever (John 1:14; Romans 9:5; Colossians 2:9; Hebrews 13:8).

—that He died upon the cross a vicarious substitutionary death, thereby making atonement for the sin of the world (John 1:29). We believe that He is the only Redeemer (Acts 4:12), and that His atonement is sufficient for the sins of all the world (Hebrews 7:25; I John 2:2), and efficient for all who believe (John 3:16, 36; Isaiah 45:22).

—that He bodily arose from the dead, that He ascended into Heaven, that there in His state of glorification He is now the interceding High Priest, Intercessor, and Advocate for all believers (I Corinthians 15:20; Luke 24; Acts 1:3; Hebrews 7:25, 4:15, 2:17; I John 2:1).

—that as in His first advent He became incarnate and dwelt on earth personally, bodily, visibly in an earthly tabernacle of flesh, the body of His humiliation, even so in His second advent He will return personally, bodily, visibly, but in the body of His glorification, to set up His kingdom and to judge the world in righteousness (Acts 1:9-11; I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Matthew 25:31-46; Revelation 20:4-6, 11-15).
—that man, created in the image of God, fell into sin through the sin of the first Adam and in that sense is lost and separated from God. In order to secure salvation and restoration, man must be born again. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ “Who His own self bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (I Peter 2:24). The punishment of the wicked and unbelieving, and the reward of the righteous are everlasting, and as the reward is conscious, so is the punishment (Genesis 1:26-28; Romans 3:10, 22-23; John 3:16; Acts 4:12, 13:38-39; Matthew 25:46; II Corinthians 5:1; II Thessalonians 1:7-10).

—that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Godhead, indwells all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 6:19), baptizes them into the body of Christ, and seals them unto the day of redemption. The Holy Spirit convinces and “reproves the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment” (Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 12:12-14; Ephesians 1:13-14, 5:18-20; John 16:8-11).

—that the Church is the body of Christ, a spiritual organism composed of all born-again persons in this present age. The mission of the Church is to witness concerning the Head, Jesus Christ, and to preach the gospel among all nations. The Church will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air prior to his appearing to set up His Kingdom (Ephesians 1:3-6, 22-23, 25, 30; I Corinthians 12:12-14; Matthew 28:19-20; I Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Even these declarations of faith do not define in detail what an individual Christian might believe in many important areas of doctrine and theology. Moreover, as a college seeking to serve evangelical Christians from many denominations, we feel less of an obligation to decide these various points in detail than we do to celebrate not only our unity in Jesus Christ but also our freedom to disagree, and to continue grappling in the many non-essential elements of our faith.