

**Student Learning Standards**  
**Westmont College**  
**May 2002**

*Introduction*

A degree from Westmont College, like a degree from any other institution of higher education testifies to the fact that a graduate has completed a prescribed number of courses and has earned a requisite passing grade in each course. Various honors suggest that some students have mastered the material more fully than others. In addition to acquiring these quantifiable aspects of an education, we at Westmont also hope that our students have been put on a trajectory of development, as a result of their education, that will lead them to live wisely and effectively, and to be agents of God's loving and gracious redemptive purposes in the world. These larger hopes are embodied in the documents on philosophy of education in the college catalogue.

While Westmont, and most other educational institutions, would readily agree that an education is much more than the accumulation of units and the attainment of a certain grade point average, there has been considerable reluctance in higher education to seek to measure the accomplishments of an education in areas other than cognitive course work. This reluctance is, in part, because the full measure of the effectiveness of an education cannot be taken until long after one has graduated; the measure of an education can only be taken over the course of a lifetime. This reluctance is also recognition that many of the goals of education are not readily assessable by traditional modes of testing and measuring. Thus, there is the concern that, if there is an insistence on measuring all aspects of an educational vision, this will only result in a more circumscribed education vision. This reluctance emerges especially in a context where our deepest hopes in educating students are linked to concerns for their growth in intellectual, moral and spiritual independence and integrity.

In addition to all the practical worries about how to measure fully and accurately the results of an education, there is also a philosophical concern when people speak of measuring the effectiveness of an educational institution by the "learning outcomes" of its graduates. Such emphasis on assessing learning outcomes can seem to suggest that learning is a mechanical process where results can be guaranteed as a result of certain inputs. There is the worry that this approach does not adequately take into account the freedom of a learner to choose not to learn, or that it substitutes a coercive picture of education for a vision of education as invitation. An education that transforms a person must involve the willing engagement of the will of the learner.

So, we at Westmont clearly recognize the limitations inherent in any effort to assess many of our educational goals—including some of the goals most crucial to a Christian liberal arts educational vision. Further, we also firmly reject any view of assessment that threatens the freedom of the learner, or that seeks to limit the goals of an education to those that can be quantitatively measured, or that fails to recognize the element of mystery and wonder that is central to a deep and transformative vision of education.

Nevertheless, we want to affirm the value of an institution's commitment to ongoing assessment of its programs, its faculty and its pedagogical strategies. We want a process in place that not only insures regular review of our curriculum and our instructional strategies, but that provides incentive for the feedback from these reviews to result in ongoing improvement of our programs

and our pedagogy. We believe that there is great value in naming the goals of our educational vision, both those goals that are more obviously measurable, and those that are not. In owning our goals openly, we as faculty are more likely to be intentional and creative in pursuing them in ways that are appropriate in our various disciplines. Furthermore, if our goals are openly owned in a way that enlivens our community discussion about pedagogy, we are more likely to learn from each other across disciplines about how we might be more effective. We hope that, in seeking to evaluate the progress of our students in these areas, we may find more effective ways to foster a large and rich Christian liberal arts environment at Westmont College.

Our six Student Learning Standards concern themselves with those areas of an education that go beyond mastery of the content in any particular subject area. One might say that these standards concern themselves with aspects of our education that are common to all areas of study at Westmont. Furthermore, they represent aspects of our educational process that are both prerequisites to obtaining an education in any particular subject area, but they are also constantly being developed as a result of the study of any particular subject area. We certainly recognize that mastery of content is at the root of any education, and we are taking for granted its importance in this document. The assessment of particular disciplines we leave to the various departments. These college-wide standards, while certainly not exhaustive, do attempt to go beyond the learning outcomes that are assumed in any particular discipline, to recognize those areas of learning that are more distinctly characteristic of a Christian Liberal Arts education.

## **Christian Orientation Standard Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

We want students to be informed about the Christian faith, and we desire that their lives be characterized by practices, affections, and virtues that grow out of a life of Christian faith. In keeping with that faith, we are committed to pursuing these goals in a spirit of hospitality and invitation, rather than in a spirit of coercion, manipulation, or intimidation.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

**Knowledge.** 1) Students will be familiar with scripture, Biblical scholarship, Christian doctrine, church history, and world religions as they relate to the subject matter of each course. They will be familiar with the ways in which Christian faith and subject matter challenges and informs each other. 2) Students will be familiar with a variety of devotional resources growing out of the concerns of a discipline in particular or the concerns of thoughtfully educated Christians, in general.

**Practices.** Students will cultivate habits of integrity, self-reflection, church involvement, justice, peacemaking, service, and stewardship.

**Affections.** 1) Students will recognize ways in which the subject matter increases their sensitivity to, and enriches their enjoyment of God and other people. 2) Students will consider how the subject matter of their courses invites them to modify their “habitual objects of attention” according to Philippians 4:8.

**Virtues.** As opportunities present themselves both inside and outside the classroom, students will practice courage, self-control, prudence, faith, hope, and love.

## **Critical-Interdisciplinary Thinking Standard Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

Students are versatile thinkers, able to use appropriately the tools provided by different disciplinary methodologies and to understand that each discipline implies a particular epistemological orientation. Critical interdisciplinary thinking requires students to combine a variety of discipline-specific reasoning abilities in attempts to solve problems or answer questions. It also requires them to have the ability to frame appropriate questions; to think abstractly; to test definitions of key terms and categories of analysis, and to examine one's own assumptions.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

**General Skills.** Students are capable of exercising general critical thinking skills.

**Range of Disciplines.** Students are capable of critical thinking in a wide range of disciplines.

**Complex Problem Solving.** Students are capable of complex problem involving more than one form of critical thinking.

**Collaborating.** Students are capable of collaborating with people in other fields in order to solve problems and make decisions.

**Limits.** Students recognize the limits of critical thinking in the search for truth and wise behavior.

**Appropriate Attitudes.** Students are able to think critically with the appropriate attitudes (e.g., humility, charity).

## **Diversity Standard Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

Students have the understanding and skills to engage people unlike themselves--both individuals and groups--in ways that affirm others as persons created in God's image. Students are able to approach others respectfully--avoiding the natural tendency to deal with differences by vilifying, romanticizing, or victimizing.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

**Self-reflection.** Students demonstrate increased self-reflection on how their beliefs, values, ideas, and practices—while not solely a function of one's context—are influenced by social class, gender, ethnicity, culture, and historical moment.

**Discussion and Analysis of Issues.** Students demonstrate the ability to bring the dimensions of social class, gender, ethnicity, and culture to the discussion and analysis of issues within their disciplines, as well as to discussions of broader social, cultural and political issues.

**Formulation of Knowledge.** Students are able to recognize that, while knowledge is not solely a function of social construction, any formulation of knowledge may be affected in important ways by gender, social class, ethnicity, and culture.

**Cross-cultural Communication Skills.** Students have gained increased cross-cultural communication and adaptation skills, empathy, self-awareness, flexibility, understanding of the influence of context, social roles, and culture on behavior, and the ability to locate and evaluate information about other cultures.

**Process of Making Choices.** Students understand the process of making ethical, Christian choices within multiple cultural contexts, avoiding premature judgments.

**Essential Christianity v. Cultural Peculiarities.** Students have an understanding of the Christian church cross-culturally, distinguishing between what is essential to Christianity and what is peculiar to a particular culture.

**Foreign Language.** Students will have an appreciation of the advantages and insights to be gained from the study of foreign languages and literature.

## **Active Societal and Intellectual Engagement Standard Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

It is our hope that students are equipped to benefit from a Westmont education over the course of a lifetime. As a result of their educational program, they will have the skills, attitudes and commitments that enable them to be effective in both their personal and vocational lives throughout all the stages of their lives.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

**Interpersonal Competence.** Students/graduates possess the interpersonal competence that enables them to be effective in a quickly changing and demanding workplace.

**Sympathy.** Students/graduates have broad and expansive sympathies for all those in conditions of confusion, suffering, and vulnerability as well as for the natural world.

**Responsibility.** Students demonstrate responsibility for their learning.

**Equipped for Lifelong Learning.** Students are equipped with the tools to continue learning throughout their lives, both because learning can become a source of lifelong satisfaction, and because of the ever-changing nature of our world.

**Christian Vocation.** Students/graduates develop a sense of Christian vocation that will inform career goals, marital choices, and other central lifestyle decisions.

**Effective Participants.** Graduates have the skills, knowledge, and motivation to be effective participants in the civic, charitable, and cultural lives of their communities.

## **Written and Oral Communication Standard Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

Students will be effective communicators, both as speakers and writers, in a wide range of contexts. Their communication, both at the personal and professional level, will be characterized by clarity, accuracy, and graciousness.

### **Specific Student Learning Outcomes**

**Lower to Higher Order Thinking Skills.** In both speech and writing, students demonstrate a full range of abilities from lower to higher order thinking skills.

**Rhetorical Effectiveness.** Students are able to speak and write with rhetorical effectiveness, using a variety of forms and modes appropriate to a range of settings and purposes.

**Creativity and Intellectual Virtues.** Students' speaking and writing display creativity and the intellectual virtues of fair-mindedness, openness to ideas, openness to criticism, and judicious and patient use of reasoning.

**Historical and Cultural Awareness.** In both speaking and writing, students display historical and cultural awareness.

**Christian Faith Without Clichés.** Students are able to speak and write about matters of the Christian faith in relation to learning without reliance on popular clichés.

**Mature, Critical Assessment.** Students are capable of mature, critically insightful self-assessment and peer assessment of both writing and speaking.

## **Research and Technology Standard: Student Learning Outcomes**

### **Introduction**

Students will have the skills and critical understanding necessary to make use of appropriate technologies in accessing, evaluating and communicating information. In addition, they will possess the critical capacities necessary to evaluate the impact of technology on their work and in the world—understanding both the possibilities and limitations of technology.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

**Discernment.** Students will learn to discern the quality and appropriate use of a full range of databases and other sources of information.

**Research and Documentation.** Students will be familiar with appropriate research and bibliographic guides, equipment, and professional documentation standards in their major area of study.

**Organization and Communication.** Students will develop basic skills in word processing, database management, spreadsheets, and presentation software appropriate to their major.

**Integrity.** Students will be committed to integrity in the use of research materials, research methodologies, and documentation.

**Ethical Issues.** Students are sensitive to a range of moral and ethical issues raised by technology--including privacy, respect for fellow users online, equity of access, and various addictions.

**Possibilities and Limitations.** Students are sensitive to the limitations and possibilities of technology for human well-being.