To the Professional Development Committee

From John Sider

September 12, 2007

REPORT ON SABBATICAL 2006-2007

My sabbatical time was spread over two semesters: shared in the fall with two courses and in the spring with one. This arrangement allowed more time for maturing both the methods and the conclusions of the research.

Very soon after I started on the primary sources last September, it was clear that my original plan (i.e., to survey the whole educational history of Westmont College) was too ambitious. Accordingly I restricted my research to documents and publications relating to the decade of 1940-50: trustee, faculty, and student council minutes, correspondence and memos, alumni reminiscences of 1937-47 in the archival Thelma Bain Kramar Project, yearbooks, the student newspaper, college catalogs and *Bulletins* (including the catalogs, in those days), and *Couriers* (the constituency periodical that eventually superseded the Bulletins).

When I had digested everything of this sort that was available, the time remaining for interviews, and for writing up my findings, was too short to include any more than the Emerson years. Hence the chronological limits of the report recently “published,” *The Liberal Arts at “The Wheaton of the West” 1940-46*. This “chapter 1” is extraordinarily long. For the founding years I’ve had to draw a picture of the whole educational scene, but I expect to limit succeeding chapters to significant changes in the picture; and for the book I hope will eventually materialize, chapter 1 could be condensed somewhat.

Having received permission to use my Distinguished Professor stipends of 2006-2008 to buy out one course in the spring of 2008, I’m expecting to complete chapter 2 by spring or summer. Because the documentary research for ‘47-50 is complete I’ll be devoting the available time to interviews and writing. Upon retiring in 2008 I intend to spend approximately half time to pursuing the project toward its completion. With that in mind, it may be necessary to defer some of the work on chapter 2 during this academic year; my first priority is to interview many of the oldest alumni of the college since 1947 and, if possible, all the surviving retired professors and administrators, while they are still alive and capable.

A glance at the notes to my chapter 1 shows how large is my debt to the Thelma Bain Kramar Project, especially for the human elements of the story. Her collection of reports from alumni in the first years is absolutely unique in our archives—there’s no way I can sustain the impressions of chapter 1 without something similar for the later periods. Dana Alexander has agreed to undertake the same kind of project for the years closest to his time as a Westmont
student, and I’m hoping to enlist others, such as Ed Potts, Dale Meyers, Linda Lindberg, and Bob Ludwick. Their combined efforts would supply me well into the seventies.

All my research projects have been deeply satisfying; but none of the others comes close to this one, for personal profit and pleasure both—because of my inclination toward historical work, and because the subject represents my own lifetime investment.

I’ll be happy to report to the faculty at a forum (or by whatever medium you may prefer), and to furnish additional information, if necessary. Please accept my heart-felt thanks for your support and encouragement in this project. I appreciate this opportunity as one of the greatest of my many blessings at Westmont. And please know that I’m willing to hear whatever suggestions, advice, or prescriptions you may have in mind.