

## **The Purpose of General Education at Westmont**

### **Academic Program**

In keeping with our overall philosophy of education, our academic program is designed to foster intellectual vitality, Christian character, and commitment to service that will last a lifetime. Crucial to this goal is providing our students with an education that is both deep and broad. In the context of a major, students learn the discipline of submitting to a particular methodology and of mastering a specialized body of content. It is in their general education that they acquire the tools for relating this specialized knowledge to other realms of understanding, to their own lives, and to the world around them.

### **Major Program**

Each student, by the end of the sophomore year, will choose a major program. (The various major programs are outlined later in this catalogue.) The primary purpose of a major is to provide students with the experience of going beneath the surface of a field of learning. Though the particular skills of “going deep” may vary from discipline to discipline, the overall experience inculcates such broadly applicable virtues as patience, persistence, sustained attention, and awareness of complexity and ambiguity.

### **General Education**

In the tradition of the liberal arts, Westmont’s academic program requires students to set their major programs of study within the larger context of General Education. The General Education framework ensures that a student’s major program will be supported by the skills, the breadth of knowledge, the strategies of inquiry, and the practices that will enable them to mature in wisdom throughout their lives and to apply their learning effectively in the world around them.

As a liberal arts college in the Christian tradition, we ground our pursuit of learning and wisdom in the context of God’s revelation—manifested in the scriptures and in the world around us, and apprehended through reason, observation, experimentation and the affections. Through the General Education program, students develop the necessary contextual background, concepts, vocabulary, and skills to support their exploration of these various avenues to understanding the world.

In addition to developing knowledge and skills, our general education curriculum at Westmont seeks to inspire students to become constructive agents of redemption in a diverse and complex world. Thus, the General Education program provides opportunities for students to encounter a variety of viewpoints, cultures, and languages. Finally, we offer students the opportunity to practice their learning in the context of concrete experiences that facilitate the acquisition of wisdom, empathy and practical expertise.

## An Introduction to General Education at Westmont

Westmont students grow in ways that reflect the rich diversity of God's created order. But students are nourished by a common grounding that provides a shared context for growth in the Christian liberal arts tradition. As they grow in faith, students become rooted in the canon of the Old and New Testaments and in theological understanding. As they grow in skill, students cultivate their ability to write cogently, to reason mathematically, to converse in a language other than their native tongue, and to be fit stewards of their bodies. As they grow in knowledge, students increase their ability to grasp world history, to read and analyze discerningly from a Christian perspective, and to distinguish truths and values as they think through issues of eternal significance.

Recognizing the breadth of their heritage, Westmont students explore a variety of the branches of human knowledge and inquiry. Such exploration necessarily involves choice. In choosing courses, students will encounter the modes of inquiry and ways of thinking of some disciplines and not others. But the array of options within the general education program ensures that in reaching out to a wide variety of specific branches, each student will grasp something of the rich diversity of human learning as an organic whole. By becoming familiar with the vocabularies and types of questions asked in several disciplines, students equip themselves to be members of an increasingly global and diverse intellectual community.

Students encounter their heritage through courses labeled Common Contexts, Common Inquiries, and Common Skills. Each Common Contexts class grounds students in a body of material and explicitly invites them into an understanding of the Christian liberal arts. Each Common Inquiries class empowers students to explore the knowledge, methodologies, and modes of inquiry of a given discipline. Each Common Skills class encourages students to develop their verbal, quantitative, or physical dexterity.

As they grow deeper in the common ground they share with other members of the community, Westmont students also master the methods and knowledge of their chosen majors. But a Christian liberal arts education is more than an intellectual exercise; students must incarnate their emerging maturity in competent and compassionate action. Living out what one has learned not only embodies the liberal arts tradition, which has always sought to produce informed and capable citizens, but also the Christian tradition, in which faith is demonstrated through works.

Reflecting the rich diversity of creation, such blossoming may take many different forms. It may emerge from and be demonstrated within the student's major field of study, or within academic work outside the major. Students demonstrate the capability not just to know but to do, not just to study but to perform, not just to speak clearly but to communicate cross-culturally, not just to recognize right but to enact justice. A student completing general education and a major field of study leaves Westmont ready to live out the good news of Christ and the empowerment of education. However difficult it may be to acquire, a Christian liberal arts education exists to be given away, for free, in a lifetime of competent, compassionate service to God and to others.

## An Overview of General Education at Westmont

<b>I.</b>	<b>Common Contexts</b>		
	<b>A. Biblical and Theological Canons—12 units</b>		12
	<i>Students take the following three courses at Westmont:</i>		
	1. Life and Literature of the Old Testament (4)		
	2. Life and Literature of the New Testament (4)		
	3. Introduction to Christian Doctrine (4)		
	<b>B. Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts—8 units</b>		8
	<i>Students fulfill the following two requirements at Westmont:</i>		
	1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value (4)		
	2. World History in Christian Perspective (4)		
<b>II.</b>	<b>Common Inquiries—32 units</b>		<b>32</b>
	A. Reading Imaginative Literature (e.g., English, Modern Language) (4)		
	B. Exploring the Physical Sciences (i.e., Physics, Chemistry) (4)		
	C. Exploring the Life Sciences (i.e., Biology, Psychology) (4)		
	D. Performing and Interpreting the Arts (i.e., Music, Art, Theatre Arts) (4)		
	E. Reasoning Abstractly (i.e., Philosophy, Religious Studies, Mathematics and Computer Science) (4)		
	F. Thinking Globally (e.g., Sociology/Anthropology, Political Science, Religious Studies, Economics and Business) (4)		
	G. Thinking Historically (e.g., Art History, History of Mathematics, History, Religious Studies) (4)		
	H. Understanding Society (e.g., Sociology/Anthropology, Political Science, Economics and Business, Communication Studies) (4)		
<b>III.</b>	<b>Common Skills—12 units</b>		<b>12</b>
	A. Three writing-intensive or speech-intensive courses		
	1. Writing for the Liberal Arts	4	
	2. Writing- or speech-intensive course within the major	--	
	3. Writing- or speech-intensive course outside the major	--	
	A. Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning	--	
	B. Modern / Foreign Languages	4	
	C. Physical Education	4	
<b>IV.</b>	<b>Competent and Compassionate Action</b>		
	<i>A. Complete one of the following three options:</i>		
	1. Productions and Presentations		
	2. Research		
	3. Integrating the Major Discipline		
	<i>B. Complete one of the following two options:</i>		
	1. Serving Society; Enacting Justice		
	2. Communicating Cross-Culturally		

Total Units

64

## The Components of General Education at Westmont

### I. Common Contexts.

#### A. Biblical and Theological Canons—12 units

These courses increase students' biblical and theological literacy, providing them with essential resources for the integration of faith and learning throughout the curriculum.

*Students must take the following three courses at Westmont:*

1. Life and Literature of the Old Testament (4)
2. Life and Literature of the New Testament (4)
3. Introduction to Christian Doctrine (4)

#### B. Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts—8 units

The requirements in this section introduce students early in their time at Westmont to the nature and purpose of a Christian Liberal Arts education. Although each of these requirements introduces students to the Christian liberal arts through a particular disciplinary or methodological lens, they all are intended to draw students explicitly into the questions and the concerns that we hope will pervade their entire education at Westmont. These themes include, among others: an exploration of what it means to be human; what it means to live a good life; and what it means to pursue justice as a citizen of both this world and the Kingdom of God. As a result of having fulfilled these requirements, students will have an appreciation for the development of the Christian Liberal Arts tradition. In addition, they will be on their way to developing categories of critical evaluation, sensitivity to historical context, empathic imagination, and other essential capacities of a liberally educated Christian.

*Students must fulfill the following requirements at Westmont:*

1. **Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value (4)** Courses satisfying this requirement focus on how we can establish and know truths—or on how we can clarify and enact ethical values. Students in these courses should: understand the nature and strength of competing truth claims, or know how to apply various criteria of evaluation to the moral life; recognize the possibility and importance of drawing meaningful conclusions about matters of truth or ethical value; emerge with a sense of how to think Christianly about critical, normative, and evaluative questions of truth and values.

The Philosophy Department will have primary responsibility for this requirement, supplemented by other courses that address a comparable range of philosophical concerns. Such courses might include: Biology courses in environmental ethics, sociobiological theories of morality, or bioethics; Anthropology courses that explore the bases on which the worldviews of various cultures are constructed; Political Science classes on Christianity and politics, or on post-colonialism and developing nations; Economics classes on poverty and economic development.

2. **World History in Christian Perspective (4)** Courses satisfying this requirement explore world history from a Christian perspective, and includes critical

discussion of the term "Christian perspectives" as a concept whose definition is subject to interpretation. Geographically comprehensive and chronologically wide-ranging, the course emphasizes the historical rootedness of all traditions—the Christian tradition included. By challenging cultural stereotypes, the course helps students develop a thoughtful and informed approach to other cultures. The History Department will have primary responsibility for this requirement.

**II. Common Inquiries** Common Inquiries courses will, collectively, seek to introduce students to a range of methodological approaches that one might employ in the quest for knowledge. These courses would give particular attention to various ways of acquiring knowledge and evaluating information, and would incorporate appropriate consideration of the resources and implications of information technology. Courses may be either disciplinary (taught by one professor with demonstrated competence in that methodological approach) or interdisciplinary (team taught).

*Students take one course from each of the following seven categories.*

- A. **Reading Imaginative Literature** (e.g., English, Modern Language) Courses satisfying this requirement develop students' skills in analyzing and understanding the ways of knowing provided by imaginative literature. Such an approach invites students to see how literature reveals things we cannot know except by inference or by metaphor. Students in these courses should recognize how imaginative literature honors the complexity of human experience. Further, by encouraging the practice of compassion by imagining the other, the course involves students in ways of knowing that are inherently ethical.
- B. **Exploring the Physical Sciences** (i.e., Physics, Chemistry) Courses satisfying this requirement introduce students to basic properties and principles of matter, examining structure and function in elementary physical systems traditionally studied by physicists and chemists. Students should come to appreciate both creative and systematic aspects of scientific method, and should come to understand the power of theory and prediction within the framework of empirical/experimental modes of inquiry.
- C. **Exploring the Life Sciences** (i.e., Biology, Psychology) Courses satisfying this requirement introduce students to complex living systems within the framework of the natural sciences. Courses may either help students experience the breadth of disciplines encompassed by the life sciences or focus more narrowly on a single field of study. In either case, courses will emphasize fundamental understandings of life processes rather than the technical applications based on those principles. As appropriate, students will be introduced to the methods used to develop the models of life processes they are studying, and they should come to understand both the strengths and the limitations of those methods, especially as they impinge on a broader philosophical view of life.
- D. **Performing and Interpreting the Arts** (i.e., Music, Art, Theatre Arts) Courses satisfying this requirement develop students' understanding of the fine arts and

performing arts, including music, visual arts, theatre, or dance. Such courses develop and expand perceptual faculties, develop physical practices integral to the art form, and explore the critical principles which guide artists in the area.

- E. **Reasoning Abstractly** (i.e., Philosophy, Mathematics and Computer Science) Courses satisfying this requirement focus on critical and analytical reasoning about non-empirical, abstract concepts, issues, theories, objects and structures. Students in these course should learn to understand and evaluate abstract arguments and explanations, analyze abstract concepts and solve abstract problems.
- F. **Thinking Globally** (e.g., Sociology/Anthropology, Political Science, Religious Studies, Economics and Business) Changes in economic, political and environmental conditions are contributing to an increasingly interdependent and connected world. Students will study cultural, religious, political or economic practices with an eye to appreciating interactions between people from different ethnicities and world contexts. In the process, they will better understand other perspectives and world views – extending beyond those rooted in “Western” experiences – and will appreciate the deep influence of culture on the categories one uses to understand the world. Acquiring a global perspective equips students to be informed agents of redemption and justice in a rapidly changing world.
- G. **Thinking Historically** (e.g., Art History, History of Mathematics, History, Religious Studies) Courses satisfying this requirement develop students’ awareness and appreciation for the particularities of time and place, a sense of the complex process of change and continuity over time, the ability to work critically with a range of primary and secondary historical texts, and appreciation for the art of constructing historical narrative. By studying specific historical periods, the history of Christianity, the history of academic disciplines, or by taking interdisciplinary courses, students should: become critical readers of a range of historical sources; appreciate the importance of historical context in shaping our understanding; of the world in which we live; be able to engage in thoughtful interpretive and historiographic discussion; have practice in constructing a historical narrative; understand the complexity of historical change.
- H. **Understanding Society** (e.g., Sociology/Anthropology, Economics and Business, Political Science, Communication Studies) Courses develop students’ understanding of social phenomena analyzing and explaining a wide and varied range of human behavior and social institutions and practices. Students should recognize the dynamic interplay among individuals, societal infrastructure, and public policy intention and resultant activities. Students should also understand the processes of the political economy, the nature of technology and innovation as social phenomena, and the interaction of private enterprise and the public sector. Courses provide exposure to a breadth of literature regarding models or theories that explain social phenomena. Students will acquire competence to evaluate these phenomena through observation, data collection, and quantitative and

qualitative analysis. Students should reflect on the applications of contemporary technological advances and their impacts on personal relationships, research methodologies, the inquiry process, and the accumulation and dissemination of new knowledge.

**III. Common Skills** Each Common Skills class encourages students to develop their verbal, quantitative, or physical dexterity. Students in these courses are also expected to demonstrate competence in a wide range of contemporary information technology processes.

**A. Three Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Courses** Students develop their communication skills at Westmont by taking at least three courses that emphasize writing fluently or speaking clearly and effectively. Such writing-intensive or speech-intensive courses encourage students to develop their abilities to articulate information, ideas, and convictions both in written and oral discourse. Students are expected to be able to communicate effectively to a wide range of audiences, within the academy, the church, and the public. The Writer's Corner enables students at all levels to discuss writing strategies individually with peer consultants.

A course is designated writing-intensive if students write at least four papers (totaling at least 16 pages) that are assessed for written form as well as content, and; receive some component of instruction in writing or have the opportunity to revise at least one paper in response to comments from the professor.

A course is designated speech-intensive if students make at least three oral presentations (totaling at least 30 minutes) that are assessed for structure and style as well as for content, and; receive instruction in the organization, preparation and delivery of public presentations.

1. **Writing for the Liberal Arts (4)** All students should take a writing-intensive course during their first year at Westmont. Many students will fulfill this requirement by taking English 2: Composition for the Liberal Arts. However, students with Presidential scholarships may fulfill this requirement by taking any writing-intensive honors course. Students with qualifying test scores (e.g., SAT II) may fulfill this requirement by taking a writing-intensive course offered by any department.
  2. **Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Course within the Major** All students take at least one writing-intensive or speech-intensive course in their major.
  3. **Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Course outside the Major** Students completing a single major take a writing-intensive or speech-intensive course in any field outside that major. Students completing a double major take a writing-intensive or speech-intensive course in both majors.
- B. Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning (4)** Since many phenomena in our world can best be understood through quantitative and analytic methods, students

should develop the ability to interpret, evaluate and communicate quantitative ideas. Central to courses satisfying this requirement is: the use of mathematical models for physical or social systems or; the understanding and communication of numeric data including the computation and interpretation of summative statistics and the presentation and interpretation of graphical representations of data. A core focus of the course should be the explicit study of quantitative and analytic methods, or, alternatively, the reflective use of quantitative methods as a tool.

- C. **Modern/Foreign Languages (4)** Westmont encourages students to continue developing their fluency in a language other than their native tongue by requiring students to complete one semester of college language beyond the level of the two-year entrance requirement to the college. Alternatively, having met the entrance requirement in one language, they may take one semester of college-level study in another language. A course in any modern spoken language (e.g. Spanish, French, or German) or ancient language (e.g. Greek or Hebrew) is accepted as fulfilling this requirement. Students are exempt from this requirement if they pass an examination demonstrating the equivalent of three semesters of college language study or present evidence of a primary language other than English to the Records Office.
- D. **Physical Education (4)** The physical education program is designed to provide instruction and exposure to fitness, skill-based and leisure activities. All students are required to take Fitness for Life and three 1-unit physical activity courses. A wellness-based foundation is laid in Fitness for Life, with the additional three activity courses providing reinforcement for a lifetime of physical activity.

**IV. Competent and Compassionate Action** The expectation that students will put their education into action may be fulfilled in a variety of ways, many of which may be part of the student's major.

A. *All students will complete one of the following three options at an advanced level:*

1. **Productions and Presentations** Participation in a course that provides a substantial opportunity for creative production and performance or presentation. This may be met by participation in an upper-division applied art course, music ensemble, dance performance, or theatre production. In addition, upper-division courses in a wide variety of disciplines may provide suitable occasions for students to complete a major research project. The following list is meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive:

Area of Coursework	Potential Projects
Computer Science	development of a significant computer project
Economics and Business	business plans and presentations
Creative Writing	publication or public reading
Kinesiology	development of exercise programs

2. **Research** Any course or project with a substantial research component may be undertaken to satisfy this requirement. The associated activities should include identification of a problem, question or issue; formulation of a question or hypothesis; development of an appropriate methodology; review of the relevant literature; experimentation, evidence-gathering, or argument construction and evaluation; and report of the findings in an appropriate form. A major honors project would clearly satisfy this requirement, though a major honors project requires more of students.
  3. **Integrating the Major Discipline** Any course or project in the student's major that has a substantial integrative component may be taken to satisfy this requirement. Such courses involve students in reflection on the discipline – how its diverse parts form a coherent whole and how the discipline interacts with the Christian faith and with the whole of a Liberal Arts education. For purposes of this general education requirement, any senior seminar, capstone course within the major, or upper-division interdisciplinary seminar has the potential to satisfy this option.
- B. *In addition to the above, all students also complete one of the following two options:*
1. **Serving Society; Enacting Justice** Courses involve active student participation in a course with a service project, or an internship that includes significant involvement in responding to social issues. A course or internship fulfilling this requirement should deliberately raise students' awareness of issues of justice such as those grounded in social class, gender, ethnicity or human disability; the environment; or the impact of technology. This should invite students to examine their own presuppositions and to develop their skills in their exercise of charity and compassion. The service component is to be explicitly integrated into the academic content of the course.
  2. **Communicating Cross-Culturally** Courses involve an extended cross-cultural setting that is explicitly integrated into the course goals and content. This requirement could include any off-campus program that involves significant encounters with people from other cultures, in which the encounters are designed primarily to facilitate mutual understanding, dialogue, and appreciation. The requirement could also be met through an on-campus course providing significant opportunities for encounters with—rather than just learning about—people from other cultures in a context designed to facilitate mutual understanding and appreciation. Many Westmont study-abroad programs would qualify. Most courses taken on Consortium would not qualify unless they clearly meet the stated criteria.