

General Education at Westmont Supplemental Document

I. Common Contexts.

A. Biblical and Theological Canons—12 units (RS 1, RS 10 & RS 20)

Interpretive Statement

Proposals for RS 1 and RS 10 should be evaluated primarily in terms of their emphasis on biblical interpretation, whereas proposals for RS 20 should be evaluated primarily in terms of their emphasis on introducing students to Christian doctrine with an eye to specific disciplinary applications.

B. Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts—12 units

1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value (4)

Interpretive Statement

The only course offered by the philosophy department in this area will be PY6, with the new title “Philosophical Perspectives.” In order for a course outside the philosophy department to be eligible to satisfy this requirement, it must, as the catalogue description indicates, “address a comparable range of philosophical concerns.” Ideally, this would involve a course focusing on and devoting roughly equal time to philosophical questions about ultimate reality, knowledge and value. However, a course may qualify if it emphasizes one of these sorts of questions over the others as long as (a) the course is primarily philosophical in emphasis and (b) it addresses each of these sorts of questions to some extent.

2. World Civilizations in Christian Perspective

Interpretive Statement

How “comprehensive” does the course need to be, both geographically and chronologically? It is assumed that the course will cover civilization from multiple centuries and more than one continent.

It is assumed that this course will not be a part of an off-campus travel semester or Mayterm program

Place and role of the visual and performing arts? It is recognized that the visual and perform arts are a significant part of human civilization and would be appropriately included as part of this course. However, courses which primary or exclusively focus upon the history of the visual or performing arts would be too narrow in focus to meet this requirement.

II. Common Inquiries

1. Reading Imaginative Literature (e.g., English, Modern Language)

Interpretive Statement

Courses accepted as fulfilling the General Education category of Reading Imaginative Literature will meet the following criteria in approach, content, and methodology.

Approach: The course will offer an exploration of how literature can inform our lives and deepen our faith. Moving across space (to other places and other cultures) and time (to historical periods other than our own) we will seek to discern what is essentially human from what is particular to the place and time we inhabit. This mode of inquiry requires students to explore different literary genres, with the goals of:

- ❖ understanding more about how the context in which a text was written helps to determine how it should be read
- ❖ increasing respect for the benefits of paying close attention
- ❖ learning to notice the interplay of form, style and content
- ❖ appreciating presentational as opposed to propositional approaches to truth
- ❖ encountering the other with empathy, compassion and love
- ❖ articulating and wrestling with the ethical questions implicit in a text
- ❖ examining the assumptions we bring to our reading
- ❖ discerning issues of social and economic justice and the abuses of power
- ❖ deepening our understanding of what it means to read as people of faith and with increased regard for the significance of story for people of the book

Content: The focus will be on such imaginative genres as lyric and narrative poetry, prose fiction, creative non-fiction and drama. The poems, stories, and plays we read will raise some of the enduring questions about what it is like to experience love, to endure loss, to encounter the other, to cope with discrimination, to cling to faith and to entertain doubt—ultimately what it means to be human and have a sense of stewardship for one’s life. While we recognize that thoughtful writers can illuminate any human experience, courses fulfilling this requirement will focus on works of significance for their literary artistry rather than their commercial appeal. Specifically excluded are courses that focus on contemporary commercial genres such as baseball fiction, spy thrillers, science fiction, romance novels, pornography, murder mysteries, children’s literature and Westerns. Specifically included are courses focusing on works that require attention to diction (including sensory and connotative language, simile, and metaphor), image patterns, characterization, character foils, structure, setting, narrative point of view, literary allusion and literary context. Work that falls within such a capacious category includes drama from Sophocles to Shakespeare to Stoppard, prose

fiction from Jane Austen to Toni Morrison to Chinua Achebe, poetry from Dante to Gerard Manley Hopkins to Eavan Boland.

Methodology: Courses that satisfy the category of Reading Imaginative Literature will direct attention to the interplay of language and style, will consider the relationship of form and content, and will locate works within a literary tradition. Specifically excluded are approaches that see literature as a utilitarian means to some non-literary end, that would use literature as a quarry for the extraction of nuggets of sociological constructs, psychological symptoms, cultural contexts, philosophical precepts, doctrinal truths, or other paraphrasable propositions. Throughout, the course will raise literary questions as to *how* a poem means as well as *what* a poem means, *how* prose fiction complicates our response to a narrative voice as well as what the story reveals of human relationships, *how* drama offers multiple possibilities for interpretation of dialogue as well as giving timeless expression to the experience of tragedy, of reconciliation, of enduring justice and of enduring injustice.

2. Exploring the Physical Sciences (i.e., Physics, Chemistry)

Interpretive Statement

- a) The physical science general education requirement can be satisfied by taking one semester of General Physics (PH21 or PH23), or Physics for the Life-Sciences (PH11 or PH13), or General Chemistry (CHM5 or CHM6) – with or without the labs that normally accompany these courses. (Note that most students will automatically sign up for the labs together with the lecture courses.)

These introductory courses are usually taken by prospective science majors. By allowing these courses to be part of the GE offering we avoid situations where science majors who have already mastered quite difficult material are forced to go back and study the same topics again at a less sophisticated level.

It is important nevertheless that these introductory courses contain significant contributions to each student's liberal arts education. This means that, for instance, a discussion of the so-called "scientific method" must be included. Also, students could be assigned reading that connects their subject matter to theological or philosophical questions. Finally, it would be very appropriate to ask students to reflect in an essay on the relationship between their faith and their field of study.

- b) The currently existing science facilities and the size of the current science faculty prevent us from offering substantial laboratory activities as an integral part of our general education science classes. The addition of (integrated or parallel) science labs to our physics and chemistry general education courses would be highly desirable. Such labs would add increased interaction

between students and faculty, and also foster collaborative learning among students.

The desire for improving Westmont's science laboratories is shared by the physics, chemistry, and biology faculty, as well as our provost Shirley Mullen. Since interactive & collaborative learning between faculty and students is highly valued and expected by WASC, the current deficiencies in this area are not acceptable and need to be revisited.

- c) It is difficult to deal with the issue of interdisciplinary courses in a general way. There appears to exist a general consensus among the faculty in physics and chemistry that it would be best to look individually at such course proposals.

It may be more appropriate for certain interdisciplinary courses (dealing, for instance, with philosophical and theological issues in physics and astronomy) to be offered under the "common context" umbrella, and perhaps to be co-taught with another faculty member from those areas.

- d) In order for our science majors (physics and chemistry) to be able, in the future, to double major (e.g. in chemistry and philosophy, or physics and math), it may be necessary that more general education credit be given for AP classes, or for classes taken over the summer at other institutions.

3. **Performing and Interpreting the Arts** (i.e., Music, Art, Theatre Arts)

Interpretive Statement

While historical perspectives on an art form are desirable, these perspectives alone are not sufficient to qualify a course in this area. Students should be engaged in the production of at least a modest amount of art as a means of increasing their own abilities to produce art and of understanding the process by which artists create. On the other hand, studio courses will not generally fulfill this requirement since they do not provide sufficient reflection on the general principles underlying artistic production.

4. **Reasoning Abstractly** (Approved courses in Philosophy, Mathematics and Computer Science)

Interpretive Statement

Though all theoretical disciplines other than the three to which this common inquiry area is restricted involve abstract reasoning, only these latter three disciplines (a) involve a relatively high degree of abstraction and (b) employ primarily highly abstract methods and study primarily highly abstract objects. Moreover, though courses in other disciplines have philosophical, mathematical, computational and logical elements, only courses in these three disciplines make such elements their primary focus. Finally, the GE committee should not assume that every course in these three disciplines

would qualify as abstract reasoning courses. Only courses in these disciplines involving attention to formal methodology (argument, analysis, evaluation, problem-solving) would be adequate. So, for instance, courses that merely summarize philosophical views would not qualify.

5. **Thinking Globally** (e.g., Sociology/Anthropology, Political Science, Religious Studies, Economics and Business)

Interpretive Statement

The concept of "global" should be understood as more than a Western perspective on others outside North American society. It must connote more than "countries" and extend to various world "regions." When one thinks globally, it represents a clear methodology with a distinct pedagogy that recognizes competing bases from which to perceive and interpret issues. Study abroad programs do not automatically produce "global" thinking. The distinctives of "global" vs. "Western" thinking must be clearly identified within the course content.

6. **Thinking Historically** (e.g., Art History, History of Mathematics, History, Religious Studies)

Interpretive Statement

This must not be simply a course "about" history. While the subject matter may vary, the constant feature must be introduction to, and practice of, the skills of historical research, criticism, and analysis.

7. **Understanding Society** (e.g., Sociology/Anthropology, Economics and Business, Political Science, Communication Studies)

Interpretive Statement

Ideally, these should be lower division courses. Upper division offerings often require a prerequisite foundation in terms of concepts, methodologies, and theoretical orientations. Upper division courses can be appropriate provided the instructor makes clear that students lacking an introductory level background in the discipline will not be disadvantaged. It is recommended that some course content reflect cross-cultural and comparative perspectives.

III. Common Skills

1. **Three Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Courses**

Interpretive Statement

Certainly multiple assignments with a professor's feedback over the course of a semester are more beneficial in the learning process than one big project submitted at the end of the semester. However, the value of a semester-long work in progress stretches students in different ways and is invaluable to the student preparing for graduate school. The principle is four interventions in the writing process; for example, students working on an history honors paper could submit four chapters of their work during the semester.

A variety of teaching methods can be used to respect both the spirit and the letter of the law: paper revision encourages students to intensify their development of a persuasive argument or critical analysis; response writing in class concentrates on content rather than form; journaling to explore ideas promotes critical thinking; summary writing is a necessary skill developing both content and form; essay examinations are evaluated on content as well as form; etc.

N.B. Kristyn Thurman's Library Research, an on-line course on web-based research sources or an information-technology course should be required (1 unit).

3. 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 at the level of their entering proficiency. 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.

Interpretive Statement

It is understood that one of Westmont's entrance requirements is two years of one foreign language. Any student who has not fulfilled that entrance requirement must complete two semesters of language at Westmont.

A student who has fulfilled the entrance requirement of two years of one foreign language may, however, change to a new language, taking one semester of a language different from that studied in high school.

The only exemptions from the one-semester language requirement are for students who have a score of 4 or 5 on the Advanced Placement Test; test out of third-semester college language, or; have a primary language, both written and oral, other than English.

Foreign language study has always been intrinsic to a traditional liberal arts education. Focused study of a language other than our native one certainly

affords access to understanding diversity and multiculturalism. What is more, it enables a profound intellectual transformation for students who lend their minds and their imaginations to different speech patterns and, thereby, different thought processes. Of course, as people of The Word, we seek to use language with respect and love. Few of us can appreciate our native language until we have worked intensely to learn one that is foreign to us and seen our own from the outside in.

IV. Competent and Compassionate Action

1. Productions and Presentations

Interpretive Statement

If this requirement is to be fulfilled primarily through a presentation or performance demonstrating advanced skill level such as a music ensemble performance, the event should be managed in such a way that it is naturally open to the public. The event should be advertised to the campus community and should not be limited to class participants by time or venue.

When the course or project is primarily oriented toward creating a product, the work involved should be at an advanced level and should be presented to others. For example, the results of an applied art class could be part of a class show. Ideally, the show would be open to visitors beyond the class, but this is not mandatory. The scope of the presentation should be appropriate to the product. For example, while art projects should be presented at a show open to the campus and/or the surrounding community, other types of work such as software projects might be made available to potential clients.

2. Research

Interpretive Statement

Research students should write up the results of their endeavors in a manner that is suitable for the discipline. When appropriate, they also should be encouraged to present their research in a relevant venue such as a poster session, a disciplinary seminar, or a journal.

Research experiences may be proposed by either departments or individual students. In the first case, a set of common expectations that are to be part of all research experiences offered by the department to satisfy the requirement should be clearly delineated. Research experiences not offered to fulfill the GE area would not be bound by these expectations. Major honors projects are to be reviewed by the Review Committee of the Academic Senate. All other individual projects are to be reviewed by the General Education Committee.

3. Integrating the Major Discipline

Interpretive Statement

The integrative project or the course context should address three goals:

- a. Bring together disparate threads of the discipline and provide a unified view of the broad scope of the major.
 - b. Identify the discipline's place within the larger educational program.
 - c. Reflect on the relationship between the discipline and the Christian faith.
- These three goals need not be addressed equally, but should be addressed at an advanced level. A project might address only one of the three goals directly if the others are part of the surrounding discussion and/or readings. Within these broad guidelines, it is an individual department's prerogative to determine and, indeed, responsibility to articulate the most appropriate way(s) of integrating the discipline.

1. Serving Society; Enacting Justice

Interpretive Statement:

Activities designed to fulfill the Serving Society; Enacting Justice section of the General Education program should substantially conform to the following criteria.

1. The service component should be preceded by an orientation which addresses
 - a. The context in which the work will be done.
 - b. The specific goals of the activity.
 - c. The types of reporting that will be expected.
2. The service component should take place in a context where the student will have exposure to one or more of the following:
 - a. Issues of economic disparity and class.
 - b. Issues of gender and ethnicity.
 - c. Issues of environmental stewardship/ remediation.
 - d. Issues of social or political disenfranchisement.
 - e. Issues of community identity, infrastructure and safety.
 - f. Issues related to aging.
 - g. Issues of disability.
 - h. Issues related to the logistics of or structures for serving society and/or enacting justice.
 - i. Other similar or related issues.
3. The service component may take the form of direct contact and service or may take place in a setting which addresses systemic and structural concerns.
4. Typically, at least 12 hours of service should be performed.

5. The service component should be embedded in or connected to an academic context (lecture, class discussion, seminar, readings, discussions with a mentor) which will enable student to process the experience beyond a casual level.
6. There should be a clear system of accountability and reporting for both performance and processing.

2. **Communicating Cross-Culturally**

Interpretive Statement

The academic realm of “cross-cultural” is recognized as a distinctive aspect of formal study with its own body of literature, methods, and practices that instructors must be aware of, and incorporate into the course content.

The practicum/internship segment of the San Francisco Urban Program is acceptable providing that it meets the requirement/goal of significant encounters with people from other cultures - as approved by the Director of the Urban Program. Some types of pre-professional or occupational exposure in certain internships would not qualify.

Most Westmont study abroad programs would qualify provided they are not merely travel-based programs. Study abroad programs must provide substantive and programmatic pedagogy, interaction, and dialogue with people from “other” cultures. Courses must clearly demonstrate how students will actively engage other cultures and language, beyond the minimal contact experienced by a typical tourist.