Westmont desires its students to engage in joyful life-long learning through thoughtful work and service. It seeks to develop citizens who are civically minded and engaged in a diversity of work opportunities. Further, it aspires to instill in its students a sense of responsibility to care for God’s creation by working well and serving generously.

Westmont students’ participation in an experiential education program should facilitate their ability to:

1. Enlarge their vision of life-long learning to include work and service
2. Be civically minded and engaged citizens, performing public-spirited work as a lifetime practice
3. Synthesize and contextualize classroom knowledge within diverse communities of work and service
4. Develop a biblical view of work and service, demonstrating God’s love through service to others
5. Expand self awareness through the identification and practice of what they are capable of contributing
6. Broaden their skill sets in order to compete within a rapidly changing economy and job market
7. Articulate a Christian perspective on vocation and call

Westmont’s Experiential Education program seeks to enable students to achieve these overarching goals by their participation in two areas: 1) Developing workplace readiness; and 2) Engaging in service learning. Both are important to the college experience yet each yields a different outcome. A student in a service-learning course that works with the homeless may learn the importance of civic engagement or love for neighbor. However, she is unlikely to perfect her resume or hone her interviewing skills. A student enrolled in an Economics and Business practicum course may gain experience in financial planning from an internship with a local firm. He would also receive workplace training through weekly meetings in the practicum seminar taught by a faculty member. He may not realize the experience of civic engagement, however.

**Goals for workplace readiness and vocational preparation**

Students will:
- Develop effective interviewing skills
- Identify and articulate abilities and competencies they bring to the workplace
- Produce a working resume and cover letter
- Demonstrate the ability to work in a professional environment, including workplace etiquette and site-appropriate behavior
- Learn the give-and-take required of working on a team or staff
• Gain experience and references that can be used in future job searches and graduate school applications
• Explore the notion of Christian vocation and calling

**Goals for service learning**

Students will:
• Develop into civically minded and engaged citizens.
• Demonstrate God’s love through service to others
• Formulate an appreciation and understanding of course material by engaging in concrete applications of abstract theories.
• Use the skills and resources of Westmont College in service to the community

What does this look like? An example might be a student enrolled in *American Public Opinion* who learns about survey research methodology by conducting opinion polls for local non-profit organizations, such as the Santa Barbara Rescue Mission.

How do we set up an effective experiential education program that meets the above stated objectives in each of our students?

**Student Developmental Progress**

• **1st Year: First-Year Seminar.** In a first-year seminar, students will learn the basic social, academic, and life skills. This seminar could happen in a number of ways. Here are two possibilities:

  In one scenario, the seminar would be taught by a collective of faculty so that no one department shouldered too much of the load. For example, one week the Director of the Gaede Institute could choose a topic from which his first-year ambassadors benefitted, the next week the Office of Life Planning could talk about a 4-year plan, another week the internship department could share resources for serving society and starting a network, the next, an RS faculty could address Christian vocation or spiritual formation, the following the Campus Life department could talk about campus activities, and so on.

  In another scenario, the students would take a substantive course that would appeal to first year students, such as "The Politics of Film," or "The Economics of Disneyland" or "Comic-Book Art." The instructor would also be the student’s advisor the first year, introducing her to academic rigor and helping her transition into college. As part of socializing students to Westmont, the professor would also cover the topic of etiquette as in learning proper forms of addressing professors, writing emails, behaving in classrooms, etc.
• **2nd to 3rd Years: Service-Learning.** Students will take one or more courses that integrate service into the community. Although these courses can be taken at any time, it is perhaps best that students be given the early exposure to service that so often informs subsequent behavior and action.

• **3rd to 4th Year: Internship.** Students will take an internship course or participate in a research seminar within their major in upper division coursework at Westmont. This course will not only provide real-life application to their academic coursework, but it will also help with the transition into the job market or graduate school. The classroom portion of the internship course will focus on skills building, including resume writing, interviewing, and job search strategies.

**Rationale**

There are several compelling reasons for Westmont to feature experiential learning. It serves our mission to serve God’s kingdom by serving our neighbor; it helps our students in their personal development (e.g., more compassionate and civically engaged students; careful reflection upon their sense of vocation); it helps students better understand the course material (e.g., teaches lessons in ways concrete learners can understand); and it helps people in our community.

Further, experiential education can be a very attractive feature for recruiting students. For prospective students and parents, it would be a compelling message to learn that Westmont students:

• Take a first-year seminar that a) will provide them with the skills needed to succeed in college and b) provide them with a faculty mentor that will help with their college transition and would keep an eye on them throughout their Westmont career.
• Ground classroom experience in real-life applications (service learning)
• Complete an internship that will facilitate their vocational preparation and workplace readiness

Finally, current research points to the effectiveness of experiential education as a successful means of extending classroom learning as well as providing an opportunity to explore career paths.