**CUPA 2013 Assessment Summary of Findings and Suggested Recommendations**

**ILOs:** “graduates of Westmont College willdemonstrate literacy in biblical and orthodox Christian faith (Christian understanding) and demonstrate faithfulness in Christian service (Christian practices and affections).”

**“What Do We Want for Our Graduates?”:**

* “Graduates of Westmont College should have a biblical and theological understanding and an appreciation of worship and spiritual formation that exceed what can be acquired at a secular university supplemented by campus Christian fellowships and active participation in a local church.”

**Summary of Findings:**

* **Understanding:** Low to intermediate biblical literacy and theological proficiency; high variance; distinct literacies; some ‘exposure fatigue’ and confusion/insecurity/paralysis over complexities.
* **Practices:** High and widespread Christian commitment, expressed primarily in relational and service-oriented acts; some variance; church-related activity seems most fruitful.
* **Affections:** High focus on God; strengthened faith; moderate focus on others and scripture; diminishing contemplation and biblical practices, but rising church involvement; complicated ethical patterns.

**Summary of Recommendations:**

* Facilitate biblical immersion.
* Model good theological judgment, and integrate it into other learning.
* Center and inform Christian commitment.

***In detail …***

* Westmont has Christian affections and attitudes that are similar to twelve other schools in a Taylor University survey.
* Nearly all graduating seniors (96%) credit Westmont as contributing to their development as Christians.
  + Students advance in Christian understanding, practices, and affections (“CUPA”) at Westmont.
  + Nevertheless, graduating seniors lack the confidence that would motivate further growth.
  + Students desire a more internally coherent, integrated faith.

**Christian commitment** is high and widespread.

* Roughly nine-tenths of students show credible visible evidence of commitment.
* Students understand and express their faithfulness in largely relational and service-oriented ways.
* Seniors report being a little less focused on family or Christian community and a little more focused on social and political causes.

**Christian affections** are fairly typical of (but a little lower than) the thirteen schools:

* High focus on God (high agreement on everyday focus).
* Moderate focus on others (slight agreement on everyday focus).
* Moderate focus on the Bible (slight agreement on everyday engagement with the Bible in activities).
* Worship, prayer, and/or fellowship more or less weekly.
* Reflection on the meaning of prayer, scripture, and/or being a Christian weekly.
* Practicing solitude, submission, and/or silence between weekly and monthly.
* Engaging in evangelism, service, and/or sacrifice between weekly and monthly.
* Nearly all graduating seniors (96%) report having a personally meaningful relationship with God.
  1. Yet seniors think less about God (loving, creating, leading, adopting, redeeming, befriending, or ruling them) than first-year students.
  2. Westmont students as a whole think along these lines somewhat less often than the thirteen-school average.
  3. Only a minority of our students think *daily* in any of these ways.
* Almost all Westmont students call themselves “Bible-believing” and call the Bible “the authoritative Word of God” …
  1. … but they are much less insistent that the Bible has decisive authority over what they say and do.
  2. Even fewer reflect upon or discuss scripture passages regularly.
  3. Many are sometimes unsure of *how much* to believe the Bible.
  4. However, students show increased respect for scripture’s ‘human’ qualities such as historical and literacy context.
* Westmont students almost uniformly think of themselves as *Bible-believing*.
* Two-thirds of them are also comfortable with the labels *evangelical* and *born again*.
* They are uncertain about labels such as *traditional*, *conservative*, and *mainline*.
* Students tend to disavow both *religious left* and *right*, both *charismatic* and *Pentecostal*, and both *fundamentalist* and *liberal*.
  1. *Evangelical*, *mainline*, *theologically liberal*, and *religious left* are more popular than the thirteen-school average.
  2. *Born again*, *traditional*, *conservative*, *religious right*, *fundamentalist*, and *spiritual but not religious* are less.
  3. Seniors migrate even further from their less favored labels.
* In decision-making, students put consequences for themselves, families, and friends before those for Christian causes or ‘the Christian community’ …
  1. Consequences for secular causes and country are even less important.
* With obligations, students put family and Christian community before self, friends, and country.
  1. They also prioritize personal “self-development” over “happiness.”
* Students understand God to expect sacrifices for the needy, then church and family, then oneself.
* Students’ *lives* reflect love of friends, family, and self rather than the love of church or wider community that they regard as God’s expectations.
  1. These priorities match students’ generational regard for family and intensely friends-focused developmental stage and youth culture.
* **Biblical literacy** is low to intermediate among graduating seniors.
  1. Especially in what widely circulates in churches and culture.
  2. Some students do much better.
  3. Students seem much less literate than evangelicals two generations ago, or even one.
* Small group/Bible study participation drops from the first year among half of seniors.
* Church attendance increases, and is the source of seniors’ most fruitful demonstrated Christian commitment.
* **Theological proficiency** is also low to intermediate.
  1. Proficiency concentrates in areas prominent in evangelical and wider culture.
  2. Some become much more sophisticated.
  3. Oral proficiency exceeds written proficiency.
  4. Others show a worrisome lack of sound theological judgment and knowledge.
  5. Many seem to ‘specialize’ in one literacy (Bible, hymns, theology) rather than all.
  6. Fatigue from exposure to critical issues and multiple perspectives is leaving them feeling frustrated, disoriented, and paralyzed.
  7. They then resort to cliché, or re-state “what they are supposed to say” without strong confidence.
* Understanding, Practices, Affections: **What comes first?**   
  Is Westmont …
  1. a community that, secondarily, learns (like a family or church)?
  2. a gathering of learners that happens to be a community (like regulars in a library or community college)?
  3. an institution in which both are equal, separate priorities (like a fraternity)?
  4. “A community of learners” in which both are united, integral, coherent?

**Possible Recommendations**

1. Are true literacy and proficiency realistic given students’ baseline? How much (and where) can the academic curriculum help? What should be our goal for graduates?
2. Should we make first-year students aware of the problem and the challenge, to recruit them to the task of gaining proficiencies?
3. Should we integrate Bible and theology more deeply (yet naturally) across the curriculum? Where are good opportunities for individual faculty and departmental initiatives?
4. Should we encourage a Bible-bringing culture (“BYOB”?) where community members are expected to bring Bibles to chapel, class, dorm discussions of various issues, church, prayer, study groups, daily devotion, personal study, expository preaching, and the like?
5. How can we encourage sustained practices of Bible reading among our students, across many semesters?
6. Should we require basic biblical literacy (with a test and/or basic Bible content course) as a prerequisite to RS GEs?
7. How can faculty model good theological judgment, not just offer exposure and critique?
8. Students perceive ‘critical thinking’ in terms of deconstruction and skepticism. Are there better labels for capturing its spirit?
9. Should we encourage our majors to integrate matters of Christian relevance and Christian identity more deeply into their final work (*e.g.*, with a reflective essay in a capstone course?).
10. How and where can we address seniors’ more sophisticated questions and faculties of judgment?
11. Could courses (especially Serving Society) help students inform and frame “Christian commitment” in more deeply theological and biblical ways?
    1. Kingdom of God (missional participation)?
    2. Virtues (faith, hope, love)?
12. How might staff and faculty grow our proficiency and confidence in fielding students’ questions on biblical and theological matters?
    1. Faith-learning and Westmont Institute?
    2. Auditing RS GEs?
    3. Continuing education?
13. Should we separate assessment of faith-learning from
    1. data collection for tenure and promotion decisions?
    2. course evaluations?
14. Should we have standard faith-learning questions?
    1. “How have you grown in your Christian faith as a result of the activities of this course?”
    2. “How have you developed Christian practices, affections, and virtues in this course?”
    3. “How has this course contributed to Westmont’s Christian liberal arts education?”
    4. Can departments have more freedom to decide where to assess faith-learning?
15. What do we consider ‘essential’ outcomes in RS-001, RS-010, and RS-020?
    1. What is ‘important’ but not essential?
    2. What is merely ‘worthwhile’?
16. Students tend to oppose the Bible’s ‘human’ qualities and its ‘divine’ qualities. Are students learning a sufficient framework for understanding the Bible? Where should that happen?
17. Should students be advised to delay taking RS GE courses until their biblical literacy and critical judgment are better developed?
18. Should RS GEs be sequenced in a predictable way?
19. Should we pursue scholarship funding for semesters of sustained biblical/theological study?
20. Should we require basic biblical literacy (with a test and/or basic Bible content course) as a prerequisite to RS GEs?
21. How can the RS department (or others) help the college grow proficiencies, literacies, and commitment?
    1. Should RS or others help ‘plant’ campus traditions such as a Bible preaching or recitation tournament, ‘Bible baseball’ tournament, or others?
    2. Should RS faculty assist the Campus Pastor’s office, Student Life, and the Dallas Willard Center in training students for spiritual leadership in their dorms?
       1. piloting or focusing on Clark and Page?
       2. as an upper-division Religious Studies course?
       3. as a practicum?
       4. outside the formal curriculum?
22. Others?