

February 3, 2021

Dear Mark,

I am writing on behalf of the GE committee to share our revised proposal for addressing Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity in Westmont's GE curriculum. Briefly, these changes include two key parts:

1. Updating elements of general education language to better emphasize the importance of moral formation and responsibility in our liberal arts GE program and to frame conversations related to diversity. The following sections have been edited:
  - a. *The Purpose of General Education at Westmont* and *An Introduction to General Education at Westmont*
  - b. The *Biblical and Theological Canons* GE area (with extensive contributions from the Religious Studies Department)
  - c. The *World History in Christian Perspective* GE (with extensive contributions from the History Department)
2. Addition of a *Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity* requirement that asks students to consider structures of inclusion and exclusion, with a particular focus on present and historical issues of race in the U.S. context.

A related proposal, but one that we would ask the faculty to consider after voting on the JRD proposal, asks faculty to consider the category in which the JRD GE should be placed. The committee's proposal is to place the JRD requirement into a reimagined common skills category, naming it *Common Fluencies*. This change will enable our GE to better support engagement with diversity issues while aligning our GE with a more robust vision of the liberal arts than is embodied by the category as it is currently framed.

Thank you for entrusting us with this task. We look forward to seeing the further enrichment of these ideas as this proposal moves forward.

Warm Regards,

Rachel Winslow, on behalf of the 2020-21 GE committee

## **Proposal to address Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity in Westmont's GE curriculum**

This proposal encompasses two main classes of change (with 3 separate components comprising the first change). Each shift is explained under a separate heading.

### **1(a): Minor changes to the GE framing language to better emphasize the importance of moral formation and responsibility in our liberal arts GE program.**

#### Proposal

The General Education Committee proposes minor changes to the framing language under *The Purpose of General Education at Westmont* and *An Introduction to General Education at Westmont* aimed at gently clarifying that:

- Our culture may exhibit aspects of brokenness from the personal to the systemic that stand in need of reconciliation and redemption;
- Although part of our emphasis on the liberal arts includes learning for its own sake, this learning is practical and should appropriately be brought to bear on issues of practical and societal import;
- Our graduates' membership in diverse communities includes moral responsibilities which develop from commitment to the gospel;
- Diverse communities occur at both the local and global levels.

#### Rationale

We believe that these changes are consistent with the original spirit of the GE combined document and serve to clarify existing commitments, including a conviction that liberal arts perspectives are of value when addressing issues at the local and global level, including those involving diversity.

**1(b): Changes to the framing language for the *Biblical and Theological Canons* GE area to better emphasize that one aim of these classes is to lay a foundation for other GE conversations, including conversations related to diversity.**

### Proposal

The General Education Committee proposes that the framing language for the *Biblical and Theological Canons* GE area be adjusted to better emphasize that one aim of these classes is to lay a foundation for other GE conversations, including conversations related to diversity. Specifically, we propose the following language (changes underlined):

### **A. Biblical and Theological Canons**

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:***

- RS-001: Life and Literature of the Old Testament
- RS-010: Life and Literature of the New Testament
- RS-020: Introduction to Christian Doctrine

### **Interpretive Statement**

RS courses will constitute a center for the GE curriculum by establishing a common core of Christian knowledge, addressing the ways the gospel of Christ directs us to live and act, and by providing a foundation for fruitful conversation with and among all the disciplines of the liberal arts and areas of the GE. Our students will recognize that robust Christian faith is not an isolated mental or spiritual compartment, but is shaped by and shapes decisively informs, personal, church, family, academic, and public life. Thus these courses lay a foundation for students to think deeply about worship; the communion of saints; mission; evangelism; the prophetic identity of the Body of Christ as one people birthed from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages; and our shared work toward justice and reconciliation in a fallen world as they explore other GE and curricular areas.

Proposals for RS-001 and RS-010 should be evaluated primarily in terms of their emphasis on biblical interpretation, whereas proposals for RS-020 should be evaluated primarily in terms of their emphasis on introducing students to Christian doctrine with an eye to specific disciplinary applications.

**Certification Criteria** (only including the sections modified)

**Introduction to Christian Doctrine:**

Students will

1. demonstrate theological literacy by identifying central doctrines of Christian faith and forces shaping the history of global Christianity (i.e., major events, texts, debates, and contexts);
2. demonstrate skills of careful reading and analysis of theological sources.

Rationale: This change was developed in conjunction with the Religious Studies department. Its aim is to better clarify that one aim of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Christian Doctrine courses is to lay a foundation for further explorations of what it means to live out the gospel in the real world. The list of issues given was developed with the help of the Religious Studies department and is intended to be illustrative. In including issues of diversity, the Religious Studies department recognizes that gospel includes bold humility in witnessing to the kingdom of the Triune God.

## **1(c): Changes to the framing language and certification criteria for the *World History in Christian Perspective* GE category**

### Proposal

The General Education Committee proposes that the *World History in Christian Perspective* GE category include explicit consideration of how historical trajectories shape contemporary issues relating to race, ethnicity, migration, and justice in the United States and globally. Specifically, we propose adding one clause to the framing language and one certification criteria.

Proposed Language (changes underlined):

Courses satisfying this requirement will explore world history from 1300 to present. They will also introduce students to the Christian Liberal Arts through lectures and readings, and through an examination of history, which draws insights from many disciplines. Geographically comprehensive and chronologically wide-ranging, the course exposes students to the stories of diverse peoples, with the goal of challenging stereotypes and developing a thoughtful, informed approach to local and global cultures.

### **Certification Criteria**

Students will

1. identify important locations, events, people, movements, and ideas in world history from 1300 to the present;
2. demonstrate familiarity with main narratives in the field of world history (e. g. modernity, interdependence, globalization);
3. appreciate religious and cultural differences within and between world areas (including their own) and recognize how these change over time;
4. understand how historical trajectories shape contemporary issues relating to race, ethnicity, migration, and justice in the United States and globally;
5. express the distinctive characteristics of a Liberal Arts education and explain why this is fitting for a Christian.

**Student Learning Outcome** (assessed as part of Diversity and Global Awareness ILO)

Students will acquire literacy in the histories of diverse people across the globe and reflect on the importance of world history for the Christian.

Rationale: This change was developed in conjunction with the History department and recognizes how historical global trajectories have ongoing local implications. The proposed change is designed to enrich our ability to produce thoughtful scholars, grateful servants, and faithful leaders for the particular local part of the academy, church, and world in which Westmont is embedded.

## **2: Addition of a Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity (JRD) category**

### **Proposal**

The General Education Committee proposes that the Academic Senate consider the creation of a new GE requirement titled, “Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity” (JRD). This GE requirement would be an “overlay” requirement in that most, if not all, qualifying courses would satisfy at least one other GE requirement, typically a common inquiry.

### **Proposed Language**

#### **Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity**

Courses satisfying this requirement deepen students’ understanding of the value-laden processes of social inclusion and exclusion through institutional, cultural, and normative practices. They also seek to provide students with a rigorous academic space in which to explore differences in perspective while foregrounding reasoned and respectful discussion about how best to live out the biblical vision for reconciliation and human flourishing as the means for achieving common ground. In this way these courses aim at living out how God’s sovereignty over creation and reconciliation through Jesus Christ renews how we understand and relate to others as we experience increasing conformity to God’s image through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

Although these are themes resonant around the globe, issues of justice and reconciliation amid diversity are of particular urgency in the United States. Thus, while there is value in considering diversity issues in nonlocal contexts or the abstract, courses meeting this requirement need to give substantive attention to historical, institutionally embedded, and ongoing practices of inclusion and exclusion in the United States.

#### **Interpretive Statement**

The Westmont statement on “Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diversity,” commits to “the investigation and embodiment of diversity [as] a basis for excellence in scholarship and community life and anticipates the character of the world to come by signaling in our own time and place God’s promised reconciliation of creation to himself. Hence our living out of diversity bears witness to the redeeming work of Christ, and marks us with greater integrity as we proclaim his salvation” (Col 1:15-21; 2 Cor 5:16-21). Courses should amplify this commitment by exploring diversity not for its own end, but as a means to redressing unjust systems and practices in ways that are

commensurate with the Triune God's call to enact justice for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed.

For the purposes of JRD courses, social categories under the mantle of “diversity” include: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and disability.<sup>1</sup> Social categories as conceived by humans change over time and space. Yet names must be given to such categories if existing systems of influence and institutional realities are to be understood and examined. “In addition to naming categories, each course should include a breadth of perspectives on systemic injustices so that students have an opportunity to see how ideological commitments inform understandings of justice and reconciliation.”

While qualifying courses can certainly highlight regions outside of the United States, to satisfy the GE requirement, JRD courses must give special attention to injustices in the United States. Courses should emphasize historical and contemporary U.S. contexts with clear applications to race and other social categories. In addition, these courses should include a breadth of perspectives on systemic injustices so that students have an opportunity to see how ideological commitments inform understandings of justice and reconciliation.

Including justice and reconciliation in this GE's title signals that courses must not only detail “difference” but must also interrogate the implications of “difference,” especially in political, social, economic, and cultural policies and practices. Along with this, courses must also guide students to develop a hopeful vision of how they might apply what they have learned in a variety of contexts.

### **Certification Criteria**

Courses satisfying JRD should:

1. examine social norms, systemic practices, and historic patterns of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement, of belonging and marginalization, by exploring race and at least one more category including ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and disability;
2. facilitate critical reflection by requiring students to make connections between the course material and contemporary life in the United States;
3. develop frameworks for biblically and theologically informed reconciliation and social change on a variety of levels. These frameworks should be robust enough to

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<sup>1</sup> These categories are specified in the Diversity ILO.

enable students to recognize their responsibility in the work of reconciliation and social change within their own communities;

4. emphasize and model respectful interaction as an integral component of the course.

### **Student Learning Outcome for Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity**

(assessed as part of the Diversity ILO)

Students will apply a biblically and theologically informed framework to critically evaluate the ways in which diversity and applications of justice and reconciliation within the United States shape the experience of citizens and persons residing in the United States.

### **Rationale**

As articulated in the framing language of the proposed requirement, issues of diversity are intrinsically important for understanding the human condition and living out the gospel amid attitudes and practices of exclusion inimical to human flourishing. Moreover, in the current social turmoil over racial disparity and injustice, there is an especially pressing need for the College to provide students with the skills and sensitivities to understand and respond to diversity, not just as global reality, but also as a domestic one. Students themselves are demanding and expecting more nuanced responses to these issues from administrators, faculty, and staff. “As a Christian Liberal Arts institution, Westmont’s graduates must be equipped to address issues of systemic injustice in our diverse family with firm knowledge, sensitivity, Christian love, and charity,” in the words of the 2016 Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome Assessment. Such training will help them to fluently understand and responsibly navigate the world outside of the Westmont community.

### *Additional Clarification Points*

1. This proposal addresses a lacuna in our GE’s support for Westmont’s Diversity ILO, according to which graduates are expected to effectively analyze topics and human experiences using categories such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and disability with respect to a biblical vision of human flourishing. It recognizes that, to do such analysis effectively, students need a robust Biblical and theological vision of human personhood, calling, and purpose as well as an equally rigorous biblical engagement with the categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socio-economic status, and disability. The former (a Biblical/theological vision of flourishing) may be acquired through the Biblical and Theological Canons GE subcategory as it is currently envisioned, but our



existing GE curriculum does not require students to engage the latter (demographic/social realities in *relation* to flourishing, defined not in terms of power and wealth but conformity to the gospel). This proposal also recognizes how misappropriation of these categories can give rise to systemic and institutional injustices.. Further, while this is a worldwide human problem, it is one which assumes a particular form in the U.S. context of which Westmont forms a part. Thus, to prepare students to think, serve, lead, and enact reconciliation in the academy, church, and other spheres of life, students need two things. First, they need an understanding of the historical, social, and institutional trajectories in the United States which represent a marring of the biblical vision of human flourishing, defined as a life lived in glory to God experiencing increasing conformity to God’s image through the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Second, they need practical tools for promoting justice, reconciliation, and other biblically robust categories of human flourishing.

- Certainly, we could strengthen existing GE areas in ways that prepare students to better understand systemic injustices and work toward reconciliation. However, given the complexity of this task, the GE committee has determined that such development can be better accomplished through courses that rigorously consider issues of diversity, explore brokenness between people and institutions in the United States, and promote justice and reconciliation.

2. This proposal addresses needs identified by faculty, students/alumni, and administrators.
  - Faculty have previously noted relevant shortcomings in the GE. To quote the 2016 Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome Assessment: “The current ‘hit and miss’ approach (no requirement, some courses address the topic specifically)” means that “some students become very competent due to varying experiences throughout the curriculum,” yet this “leaves a sizable segment of the graduates in very precarious stages of development.”
  - Surveys of college alumni have pointed to existing Westmont courses that transformed their views on systemic racism and justice. The alumni’s concern is not that such courses don’t exist, but that most students can graduate from Westmont without taking one of these courses.
  - The administration has committed to addressing relevant curricular gaps. In a letter to faculty on March 5, 2020, the Executive Team wrote, “we want to continue reviewing our curriculum to ensure it incorporates more

voices that have been excluded and widens our lenses on historic and systemic issues.” This proposal addresses this need.

3. There are liberal arts precedents for programs like the envisioned Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity requirement. Peer institutions have rapidly been adding similar GE requirements (Wheaton in 2016, College of William and Mary in 2019, for instance).

### **Impact**

***Budget/Hiring:*** The GE requirement for JRD will draw on existing courses that 1) already meet the certification and SLO criteria, 2) have few or no prerequisites, and 3) already satisfy at least one GE requirement. The committee has identified 21 existing courses that satisfy these criteria (appended to the end of this document). As such, there are no new hires required, nor new courses that will need to be developed. (Of course, we welcome faculty to develop courses that satisfy these criteria so that we can develop even more robust offerings in the future.)

***General Education Requirements:*** While the JRD requirement adds a new item to the GE, it does so as an “overlay” and thus doesn’t alter any other GE requirements. To accomplish this, courses approved for the JRD requirement **MUST** satisfy at least one additional GE requirement. For instance, a student could enroll in ENG-002 with the thematic focus “Rhetoric of the Civil Rights Movement.” Since this course already satisfies the Writing for Liberal Arts (WLA), and has no prerequisites, it qualifies as a JRD course.

***Student Scheduling:*** Since JRD courses must satisfy at least one additional GE, there is no negative impact on student schedules. Depending on course offerings in a given semester, it is possible that only a few courses offered might fit into a student’s schedule. Even with this happening, it is still unlikely to pose a significant setback. The committee will work with department chairs in high-requirement majors to ensure that their students are not negatively affected.

### **Potential JRD Course List (21)**

BIO-197. Biology and Faith\*

EB-102. Intermediate Microeconomics\*

ENG-002JRD. Composition: Rhetoric of Civil Rights --WLA

ENG-006JRD. Studies in Literature: US Ethnic Lit. --RIL, WSI  
ENG-060JRD. Writers in Conversation: [Rotation of minority American lit. topics]  
(Mangrum)--RIL, WSI  
ENG-060JRD. Writers in Conversation: Race in American Lit. --RIL, WSI  
ENG-060JRD. Writers in Conversation: American Immigrant Lit.--RIL, WSI  
ENG-134. Race and Ethnicity in American Lit--WSI  
ENG-143JRD. Topics in Writing: Intersectional Autobiographies--WSI  
ENT-010. Introduction to Ethnic Studies--US  
HIS-177. Transnational America--TG, TH  
HIS-178. California Experience--US  
IS-144. Sociology of Immigration and Urban Poverty (WSF)--US  
KNS-140/AN-140. Food Systems--TG, SS  
KNS-181. Special Populations--SS  
PHI-137. Justice and Public Policy--US, TG  
POL-113. Race and Politics--*proposed US*  
PSY-132. Cultural Psychology--*proposed TG*  
SOC-189. Sociology of Race and Ethnicity--*proposed US*  
TA-001. Great Literature of the Stage--RIL, WA  
TA-140. Ethnicity and Gender on the American Stage--WA

\*Working with the department on satisfying additional GE requirements and certification criteria.

**Second Stage Proposal: Rename and re-envision the Common Skills GE area as Common Fluencies, which makes it an appropriate home for the JRD requirement.**

Proposal

The General Education Committee proposes that the GE category Common Skills be renamed *Common Fluencies*. We have rewritten the area's framing language to better articulate its representation of a Christian liberal arts sensibility.

**Current Language:**

**II. 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.

**Proposed Language:**

**II. Common Fluencies**

Fluencies courses encourage students to develop facilities for living well in a complex, diverse world. These include the capacity to lead healthy lives, communicate with verve and grace in various local and nonlocal cultures, use and understand numerical information, and reflect the kingdom of God in responsibly working towards biblical justice and reconciliation in a fallen world.

Rationale: The current category and language reflects an understanding of written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, language fluency, and physical education at odds with how faculty teaching these courses articulate their importance and, arguably, typical understandings of the liberal arts. Moreover, the current category does nothing to address information technology competency. We therefore propose that the existing framing language be replaced with language that better reflects our current Christian liberal arts vision of what these competencies represent.