



WESTMONT

Online Courses Post-COVID

Beginning in Mayterm 2018, with the approval of Academic Senate, Westmont piloted a few online courses to explore whether these could meet some student interest while maintaining the key features of Westmont courses in this unfamiliar mode. The courses (a writing course, a computer science course, and two internship courses) were offered again in Mayterm 2019, after a review by the Provost's Office with the same faculty who had taught the courses the prior Mayterm.

We discovered a number of advantages to providing these offerings in an online format. Students who wanted to engage in an internship in another city could still get the Westmont course experience and academic credit through Westmont. Students could also take a Westmont Mayterm course without the difficulty of covering housing costs in Santa Barbara. We know that every summer, students take courses online from other institutions and transfer the credits to Westmont, so providing students an opportunity to benefit from an online option from Westmont seemed valuable.

As we took these first experimental steps in 2018 and 2019, we never anticipated that all our faculty would be forced to experience online teaching for multiple semesters, as we have over the past year. While we can certainly be thankful that this technology allowed us to continue holding classes, no doubt most of us are eagerly awaiting the full return to the classroom and in-person learning.

As we anticipate the lessening of COVID restrictions and a return to classroom instruction, we do want to consider the place that online courses may have at Westmont going forward. Several departments have wondered whether there might be a place for occasional online offerings during our regular semesters, and certainly the potential for online Mayterm courses to be valuable remains.

It seemed wise to consult with Academic Senate about these matters, as we did in 2017-18 when we first considered online Mayterm courses. So we are bringing a number of questions to you at this time. While a few decisions may need to be made in the coming month for the immediate year ahead, we do anticipate that this discussion will be ongoing, and that any plans we may implement for next year would be assessed and evaluated, giving us the opportunity to revise our thinking and our actions going forward.

Semester Courses 2021-22

Several departments have talked with the Provost's Office about the possibility of offering some courses (particularly adjunct-taught courses) in an online format next year. In most cases, the courses are difficult to staff with local adjuncts because of the disciplinary expertise needed. For example, we anticipate needing to staff some Hebrew courses with an adjunct, and have identified a qualified instructor who lives in the LA area and would be open to teaching an online course.

As we look to next year and consider a few proposals to have a course taught online, we could consider a range of guidelines and limitations. Some questions to address:

1. Are we willing to consider offering some courses online during the academic year, even if COVID restrictions don't require us to do so?
2. Would we allow full-time faculty to offer a course online or would we limit these courses to those taught by adjuncts?
3. What efforts, if any, would we want departments to make to find a local adjunct before pursuing an online option?
4. What means of evaluating the effectiveness of an online course might be valuable?