

Proposal for a Campus-wide event on the January 6 Insurrection

The events of January 6, 2021 outraged many sections of our nation and reinforced already existing concerns about our imperiled democracy. The variety of images tied to white supremacy, anti-Semitism, Q-Anon conspiracy theorists, and other extremist agendas and the use of violence to confront political opponents pose a real challenge to our educational mission. What does it mean to educate toward responsible citizenship in a democracy? What does it mean to uphold truth when it is being subordinated to the most egregious forms of power politics?

What makes this event particularly relevant to our educational task is the role of white Christian nationalism in legitimating violence against the capital and lawmakers. This is clearly an instance when the Church must speak, but also Christian colleges. We cannot give this a pass or imagine that there will be an easy return to normalcy if we ignore it long enough. A liberal arts education is uniquely threatened when people stop believing in truth, the pursuit of knowledge, and the virtues of civility in disagreements, and when they replace such virtues with the raw pursuit of power through violence.

After 9/11 I participated in a teach-in event held in Murchison Gym with other faculty and administrators. It was an event that involved the whole college. This was not a one-off conversation about terrorism, but a catalyst for ongoing reflection across disciplines about the 9-11 attacks and related issues.

I believe it is vital for Westmont (and all CCCU colleges) to do the same. The event should involve an accurate recounting of the events of that day and invite people to share perspectives, not only from the standpoint of their disciplinary expertise, but also from their personal, visceral reaction. The event should involve contributions from all divisions of our academic program, perhaps in the form of brief, 5-10-minute talks (or longer ones with fewer people), and an opportunity for student participation and dialogue at the conclusion of the panel. It would be good for the event to receive the backing of the interim provost and the president, to be widely publicized, and draw the participation of as many of our students, faculty and staff as possible.

The event would require a good facilitator with carefully thought out ground rules that keep people accountable to time, listening, and promote wide ranging participation.