Guidance for Approval of Online Semester Courses
Approved by Academic Senate
March 2021

As a college with a mission that includes providing a context for residential learning, Westmont is committed to in-person courses. However, the conditions of the past year have given us experience with online courses, and we recognize that such courses may have a place in our future offerings.

This document provides guidance to departments that may wish to offer an online course during a fall or spring semester in the future. Rather than a checklist of criteria that must be met before a course is approved or a list guaranteeing approval, these guidelines are meant to inform a conversation between the provost and the department. Ultimately, the provost, in consultation with the department chair, will determine whether a course can be offered online.

Questions to Consider

1. Will students' learning be distinctively enhanced by an online format?

    In a few cases, an online course might provide learning opportunities that would not be available in an in-person course (e.g., an internship course that allows students to take an internship in another city); proposals for such courses might be given priority consideration.

2. Is the most qualified instructor only able to teach it online (e.g., because she lives too far from Santa Barbara to commute)?

    The meaning of "qualified" might vary from course to course and would be discussed by the provost and the department. In some cases, an academically qualified instructor without a Christian commitment might be available for in-person instruction. In such cases, it might be preferable to have a course taught online if the instructor did share Westmont's Christian commitments.

3. Will the course attract sufficient enrollment without negatively impacting in-person course enrollments?

4. Is offering an online course the best way to configure the department's course offerings and staffing or could the offerings be adjusted to eliminate the need for an online course?

    If adjustments to teaching assignments might eliminate the need for an online course, departments would be encouraged to consider such adjustments.

5. Is the total number of online courses offered in the given semester fewer than 3% of courses offered?

    Ideally, the total number of such courses would be below 10-12 per semester (approximately 3% of courses offered).