

Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity Proposal

March 22, 2022

Overview

Commensurate with the Westmont community's commitment to diversity as embodied in its Statement on the Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diversity (WSBTFD), and our desire to enhance our curriculum's ability to achieve Westmont's existing Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (Diversity ILO),¹ we propose

- Adding a new General Education requirement entitled Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity
- Amending the language which the faculty uses to administer the GE program (GE Combined Document) to improve its overall clarity and to better support and contextualize the new requirement.

¹ This proposal resulted from the collaboration of many members of the Westmont community. Its text was crafted under the care of the 2020-2021 General Education (GE) Committee of Westmont's faculty, which was tasked by then-Provost Mark Sargent and Westmont's Academic Senate to investigate how to address justice, reconciliation, and diversity in Westmont's GE curriculum. Students and faculty had reached out to the Provost's Office about such curricular revisions as early as 2016, especially after the WSCUC accreditation report and Westmont's 2016-17 Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome report expressed concern that the College lacked of a cohesive approach to meeting its Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO). The GE Committee then investigated possible ways of developing a more cohesive approach by researching diversity-related requirements at other faith-based and liberal arts colleges and solicited input from the Diversity Task Force and selected campus faculty. Based on their findings, the committee then crafted a proposal which they submitted to the Academic Senate in October 2021. Working with faculty senators, the Religious Studies department, the History department, the Provost's Office, and the Diversity Committee, GE Committee members revised the proposal to incorporate myriad suggestions and critiques. In early February 2021, the revised proposal garnered unanimous support from the Academic Senate and in March was passed by the full faculty. After the board of trustees reviewed the proposal at its May and October 2021 meetings it communicated its desire for Westmont to serve as an example to Christian Higher Education through this GE requirement and offered several suggestions for how the proposal might be strengthened in accordance with that end. Based on this and other input from the Westmont community (the BTFJRD GE requirement and other proposal language is the work of many Westmont faculty and staff), the GE committee strengthened the original proposal by more fully explaining how the requirement reflects Westmont's commitment to Biblical, Theological, and Academic excellence. These revisions also addressed practical issues associated with the implementation of this GE, including the professional development and assessment resources that will be deployed to support faculty teaching in the new GE area.

Scope

The Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity GE proposal includes six parts:

Part 1: Adds a *Biblical and Theological Foundations for Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity* requirement that seeks to equip students to engage with and serve a fallen world, specifically by asking students to consider present and historical challenges attendant to the welfare of all image-bearers, with a particular focus on race and other aspects of diversity in the United States.

Formal Motion 1: To approve a new General Education requirement, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity*, to be located alongside our emphasis on writing, speaking, languages and service.

Part 2: Updates the Common Skills category to be Common Skills and Emphases and to *include engagement with Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity*

Formal Motion 2: To change the *Common Skills* category to *Common Skills and Emphases* and to note that the category includes engagement with *Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity*.

Part 3: Updates elements of the General Education framing language to better emphasize the importance of moral formation and responsibility in our liberal arts GE program and to frame conversations related to diversity.

Formal Motion 3: To approve updates to General Education language in the GE combined document in the following sections: *The Purpose of General Education at Westmont* and *An Introduction to General Education at Westmont*.

Part 4: Updates elements of the Biblical and Theological Canons GE language to better support the role of these courses in laying a foundation for and framing other GE conversations, including those related to justice, reconciliation, and diversity.

Formal Motion 4: To approve updates to the Biblical and Theological Canons GE language in the GE combined document in the following sections: *Biblical and Theological Canons*.

Part 5: To update the World History in Christian Perspective framing language and certification criteria in the GE combined document to clarify the interconnectedness of local and global contexts and help students understand how historical trajectories help shape contemporary situations.

Formal Motion 5: To approve updates to the World History in Christian Perspective GE language in the GE combined document in the following sections: *World History in Christian Perspective*.

Part 6. To update the GE Combined Document Language to clarify that, in order for GE courses to be certified as meeting the requirements for a given GE area, they should seek to meet the GE Student Learning Outcomes for that area.

Formal Motion 6: To approve the updated language in the GE combined document that clarifies GE courses should seek to meet the GE Student Learning Outcomes for the appropriate GE area.

Description of the proposed changes:

The proposed changes for each area are given as tracked changes in the draft GE Combined Document attached to the proposal. In particular,

- The changes for *Part 1: Addition of a Biblical and Theological Foundations for Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity requirement* is given on pages B-17 to B-21.
- The changes for *Part 2: Updated Common Skills language* is given on page B-14.
- The changes for *Part 3: Updated General Education framing language* is given on pages B-1 and B-2.
- The changes for *Part 4: Updated Biblical and Theological Canons framing language* is given on pages B-4 and B-5.
- The changes for *Part 5: Update to World History in Christian Perspective GE certification criteria* are given on page B-7.
- The changes for *Part 6. Clarification that GE courses should seek to meet GE Student Learning Outcomes* are given in the certification criteria language for each GE area in the document (the first example is on page B-5).

Rationale for the proposed changes:

This section describes the reasons we as a faculty think the proposed changes will strengthen our GE program. While our arguments in this section echo elements of the proposed GE combined document language, the text in this section, as with that in the rest of this proposal rationale document, will not be incorporated into the GE combined document language used to describe and administer Westmont's GE program.

This proposal envisions changes to the framing and content of several aspects of Westmont's General Education or GE curriculum. The General Education curriculum does not constitute the whole of a Westmont education and is intended to function alongside major program curricula,

elective courses, chapel program, extracurricular experiences, and residential community life to make a Westmont education robust and distinctly Christian.

The major aim of this proposal is to support the Westmont community's commitment to the investigation and embodiment of diversity under the aegis of a biblical vision of God's loving sovereignty. Specifically, it seeks to add a new General Education requirement called *Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity* (BTFJRD). This new requirement is envisioned as the primary curricular locus of Westmont's efforts to meet its Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome (ILO), which currently reads:

Westmont graduates will 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.

The other changes in this proposal are secondary and aimed at either adjusting framing language to support the BTFJRD requirement, or to clarify existing commitments that are unclear in the current GE combined document.

The changes requested by this proposal are to be made in Westmont's GE Combined Document. The GE combined document describes our GE program. The description of each GE category in that document typically begins with framing language outlining our vision for courses in that GE area. This is followed by an interpretive statement clarifying implications of that vision for course content, pedagogy, and other practical matters. The interpretive statement is not meant to exhaustively address all practical matters relating to each GE area. Rather it functions alongside other commitments, such as those in Westmont's Statement of Faith, Community Life Statement, and other documents. After the interpretive statement, the criteria courses must meet to be certified for a given GE are listed, along with a Student Learning Outcome the course must credibly seek to achieve. Together, these elements of the GE combined document language serve to guide the faculty as they develop, approve, teach, and assess GE courses.

The changes requested to the GE are given in six parts, each with its own motion. Of the six parts, the proposed BTFJRD requirement proper is given as part 1. The remaining five are intended to either support the new requirement, update the existing GE language to reflect current commitments, or rectify weaknesses in the existing GE language that were discovered in the course of preparing the other parts of the proposal. Specifically, parts 2 through 5 represent framing language changes intended to better foreground the new BTFJRD requirement. In contrast, part 6 seeks to clear up an ambiguity in the existing GE combined document, specifically by clarifying that the criteria for certifying GE courses include that those courses must seek to achieve the appropriate GE Student Learning Outcome.

Our rationale for each requested change is outlined below.

Part 1: Addition of a Biblical and Theological Foundations for Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity (BTFJRD) requirement

This requirement comprises the central part of this proposal and seeks to remedy Westmont's lack of a cohesive curricular approach to achieving its existing Diversity Institutional Learning Outcome. This shortcoming was noted by Westmont's accrediting body, WSCUC, in its 2016 report. Thus, one of the primary goals of the requirement is to enable Westmont to deliver on the promises in its institutional learning outcomes and remain accredited in good standing.

The faculty does not just propose the new requirement as a means to meet the demands of accreditation. As articulated in the framing language of the proposed requirement itself, it reflects Westmont's commitment to Christ as preeminent over all things. Issues of justice, reconciliation, and diversity are important for understanding the human condition and living out the gospel. Moreover, to prepare faithful leaders, there is a pressing need for the College to provide students with the skills and sensitivities to engage these issues from biblical frameworks.

Specifically, this proposal addresses a gap in our General Education curriculum in helping our graduates realize a biblical vision of human flourishing for all people. It recognizes that, in order to do such analysis effectively, students need robust biblical and theological visions of human personhood, calling, and purpose. While our existing Biblical and Theological Canons courses will continue to be the primary means of accomplishing this goal, students must be able to analyze present and historical social realities in relation to a biblical vision of human flourishing and the gospel if they are to think, lead, serve, and enact reconciliation in the academy, church, and other spheres of life. Westmont Faculty, alumni, and administrators have identified a greater need for courses which work towards this goal.

The institution of diversity-related requirements at other liberal arts colleges indicate that a variety of secular and religious institutions recognize the need for graduates who are equipped to grapple with a diverse and complex world. Thus this requirement addresses needs recognized both within the Westmont community and the wider world. Moreover, it does so by equipping students to see diversity in its deepest possible context and promote a biblical vision of human flourishing for all people.

Commensurate with these aims, this requirement

- Seeks to provide students with biblical and theological understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity robust enough to be applied to those social and historical

frameworks in the United States and the world which reflect sinful social and relational exploitation

- Equips students with practical tools to promote justice and reconciliation in ways that reflect God's plan for humanity

Given the complexity of this task, the new requirement was designed as a separate requirement with its own certification criteria and GE Student Learning Outcome rather than as an addition to an existing GE category. Nevertheless, to balance out the need for a separate requirement with the overall course load burden of a Westmont degree, the BTFJRD GE requirement has been designed as an "overlay" requirement. Overlay requirements are GE requirements that can be completed on their own but are more commonly met as part of another GE or major course. For instance, a student might meet this requirement by enrolling in PHI-137 (Justice and Public Policy), which already satisfies the Understanding Society and Thinking Globally GE requirements. In this way it would operate similarly to the existing *Writing and Speech Intensive* and *Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning* GE requirements.

Additional issues related to the cost of this requirement and how it will be implemented are addressed in the implementation section of this proposal.

Part 2: Updated Common Skills language

The framing language for the Common Skills category was updated to include the proposed BTFJRD General Education requirement proposed under part 1.

Part 3: Updated General Education framing language

The proposed changes are consistent with the original spirit of the GE combined document and are proposed as a way of clarifying existing understandings about the GE program's role in equipping students to grapple with a world that is not just complex and diverse but also fallen. They also clarify that we expect students to recognize themselves as responsible members of the communities of which they are a part.

Part 4: Updated Biblical and Theological Canons framing language

The language in the Biblical and Theological Canons GE category was expanded to better clarify that one aim of the Old Testament, New Testament, and Christian Doctrine courses is to lay a foundation for further exploration of what it means to live out the gospel in the world. Although the list of topics for which these courses lay a foundation is intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive, diversity is included to emphasize that any exploration of diversity in Westmont's curriculum should be foregrounded by the biblical and theological literacy these courses provide.

The specific wording of this part of the proposal was developed in conjunction with the Religious Studies department.

Part 5: Update to World History in Christian Perspective GE certification criteria.

These changes seek:

- to clarify the interconnectedness of local and global contexts in the category framing language
- to add a certification criteria asking this course to help students understand how historical trajectories help shape contemporary issues relating to race, ethnicity, and justice in the United States.

We hope that these changes will help students appreciate the interconnectedness of local and global developments and the ongoing implications of historical trajectories.

The specific wording of this part of the proposal was supplied by the History department.

Part 6. Clarification that GE courses should seek to meet GE Student Learning Outcomes

These changes seek to clarify that GE courses need to meet GE Student Learning Outcomes appropriate to their GE area. This is an existing requirement specified in the GE approval application form for new courses. However, it is currently ambiguous in the GE combined document that defines our General Education program. We would like to remove this source of ambiguity so that our GE combined document more clearly communicates how our GE program is overseen.

Implementation

Budgetary Impacts:

The Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity GE requirement will draw primarily on existing courses that

- (a) have few or no prerequisites²
- (b) satisfy at least one other GE and/or major requirement
- (c) show evidence they can be developed to meet the proposed certification criteria

Since Westmont's General Education Committee has identified over twenty such existing courses, there are no new hires required and no entirely new courses will need to be instituted to meet this requirement. Of course, we welcome faculty to develop new courses that satisfy the requirements for this GE area so that we have even more robust offerings in the future. To

² Some disciplines plan to offer one or more upper division courses that satisfy this requirement.

this end, financial support should be given to provide stipends for faculty who wish to develop new courses (see the budget proposal in Appendix A). In addition, as described in the implementation section of this proposal, some cost may be incurred in providing the initial and ongoing faculty development and GE evaluation support needed for us to implement this requirement well.

Student Scheduling Impacts:

Since the courses envisioned for this requirement already satisfy at least one additional GE and/or major requirement, this GE will not add to the units required for a student to graduate from Westmont. Depending on the course offerings in each semester, it is possible that only a few courses will be offered which fit into a student's schedule. Since this requirement can be met by prerequisite-free courses, even if this occurs it is unlikely to pose a significant setback for students. The GE Committee can work with department chairs in high-unit requirement majors to ensure that their students are not negatively affected.

Implementation:

The Biblical and Theological Foundations of Justice, Reconciliation, and Diversity GE will help Westmont fulfill its commitment to making Christ preeminent in all things. While it will build off a solid base of faculty expertise and curricular offerings, it asks faculty to demonstrate considerable expertise in the handling of complex social and theological concepts and traditions as well as in helping students to model Christlike honesty and grace as they dialogue about topics that have been at times polarizing in our current culture. Thus we anticipate that the successful implementation of this GE would benefit from the following faculty and curriculum development resources:

- Workshops at which faculty share resources and discuss how to best advance the vision outlined in Westmont's "Biblical and Theological Foundations of Diversity" statement through the course characteristics outlined in the BTF JRD GE certification criteria.
- Workshops at which faculty work together to develop a set of shared resources that can be used to enrich faculty with biblical and theological perspectives on justice, reconciliation, and diversity and an understanding of social norms, systemic practices, and historic patterns of belonging and marginalization, including those which shape conversations about race and racism in the United States. These materials would then be made available to faculty who are interested in teaching BTFJRD GE courses.
- Workshops at which the faculty teaching in this area develop an assessment plan that could be used to rapidly improve BTFJRD courses. This assessment plan will include outcome-based assessment (*i.e.*, an assessment of how well courses in the new category are accomplishing the BTFJRD GE learning outcome and functioning according to the certification criteria) and attitudinal assessment (*i.e.* how students are experiencing

BTFJRD courses). It will occur at the course-level every semester and yearly at the whole GE-category level over the first six years of the new GE.

- Resources to conduct the assessment envisioned above and hold one “closing the loop” faculty development discussion or similar activity each semester.
- Resources for a more extensive faculty development and assessment workshop to be held at the end of the first, third, and sixth year during which we implement the BTFJRD GE. The aim of these workshops will be to collectively share any lessons learned, refine our understanding of the appropriate scope and aims of this GE category, enrich the shared set of faculty development resources, and plan for the dissemination of the assessment findings. As needed, these workshops will generate additional proposals for amendments to the BTFJRD GE and other GE language.
- In keeping with our desire for this GE requirement, we note that the impact of this GE could be multiplied if some of the faculty involved in implementing the BTFJRD GE wrote up our findings for publication and presented them at venues like the annual AACE Diversity Conference, the WASC Academic Forum, and the CCCU International Forum. Resources for these undertakings would be allocated through various budget lines within the Provost's Office.

Appendix: Courses determined to be likely candidates for meeting the new BTFJRD GE requirement.

BIO-197. Biology and Faith

COM-135 Studies in Public Discourse

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]--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