

I. An Overview of General Education at Westmont

I. Common Contexts

A. Biblical and Theological Canons

Students take the following three courses at Westmont:

1. Life and Literature of the Old Testament
2. Life and Literature of the New Testament
3. Introduction to Christian Doctrine

B. Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts

Students fulfill the following two requirements at Westmont:

1. Philosophical Reflections on Reality, Knowledge, and Value
2. World History in Christian Perspective

II. Common Inquiries

1. Reading Imaginative Literature
2. Exploring the Physical Sciences
3. Exploring the Life Sciences
4. Working Artistically
5. Reasoning Abstractly
6. Thinking Globally
7. Thinking Historically
8. Understanding Society

III. Common Skills

1. Three writing-intensive or speech-intensive courses
 - a) Writing for the Liberal Arts
 - b) Writing- or speech-intensive course within the major
 - c) Writing- or speech-intensive course outside the major
2. Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning
3. Modern / Foreign Languages
4. Physical Education

IV. Compassionate Action

Complete one of the following two options:

1. Serving Society; Enacting Justice
2. Communicating Cross-Culturally

Reasoning Abstractly

Because Mathematics and Philosophy specialize in the type of formal reasoning these two departments have decisive power to determine which courses offered by other departments will be certified for fulfilling this area.

Courses satisfying this requirement focus on critical and analytical reasoning about non-empirical, abstract concepts, issues, theories, objects and structures. Students in these courses should learn to understand and evaluate abstract arguments and explanations, analyze abstract concepts and solve abstract problems.

Interpretive Statement

Though all theoretical disciplines other than the three to which this common inquiry area is restricted involve abstract reasoning, only these latter three disciplines (a) involve a relatively high degree of abstraction and (b) employ primarily highly abstract methods and study primarily highly abstract objects. Moreover, though courses in other disciplines have philosophical, mathematical, computational and logical elements, only courses in these three disciplines make such elements their primary focus. Finally, the GE committee should not assume that every course in these three disciplines would qualify as abstract reasoning courses. Only courses in these disciplines involving attention to formal methodology (argument, analysis, evaluation, problem-solving) would be adequate. So, for instance, courses that merely summarize philosophical views would not qualify.

Certification Criteria

Students will be able to

1. identify instances of abstract reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) and can distinguish premises from conclusions (or their analogues);
2. construct an instance of valid reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving);
3. distinguish valid forms of reasoning about abstract objects or concepts (in the form of arguments, explanations, proofs, analyses, modeling, or processes of problem solving) from invalid and/or fallacious forms of reasoning.

Student Learning Outcome

Students will be able to construct valid instances of abstract reasoning.

Thinking Historically

Courses meeting this requirement will be found in a number of areas such as Art History, History, Music History, Religious Studies; however, the Department of History has a decisive power to determine which courses offered by departments other than History can be certified for this GE category.

Courses satisfying this requirement develop students' awareness and appreciation for the particularities of time and place, a sense of the complex process of change and continuity over

time, and the ability to work critically with a range of primary and secondary historical texts. By studying for example specific historical periods, the history of Christianity, the history of academic disciplines, or by taking interdisciplinary courses, students should: become critical readers of a range of historical sources; appreciate the importance of historical context in shaping our understanding of the world in which we live; be able to engage in thoughtful discussions of historical interpretations; and understand the complexity of historical change.

Interpretive Statement

This must not be simply a course “about” history. While the subject matter may vary, the constant feature must be introduction to, and practice of, the skills of historical research, criticism, and analysis.

Committee Praxis

- In general, GE courses should be open to all Westmont College students having the typical level of preparation.
- However, upper division courses in a major other than History are not inherently ruled out of satisfying the Thinking Historically category. While they are not introductory in the major, they are introductory in the introduction to historical methods.
- Few faculty are trained as historians; therefore, there is a greater burden on courses taught by faculty outside the Department of History to demonstrate that they are, indeed, engaging in “Thinking Historically.” The course (and syllabus) must give explicit and sustained attention to the historical method addressing such issues as particularities of place and time, the interaction of the subject matter with the broader culture, change over time, and the difficulties of interpreting sources.

Certification Criteria

Students will be able to

1. Read primary sources historically – asking and answering basic questions about historical sources (historical context, author, audience, genre); drawing historical conclusions from the sources and assessing their reliability and usefulness; and reflecting on how their own background shapes their interpretation;
2. Identify the arguments of secondary sources and recognize differences in interpretation.
3. Articulate responsibly how the past is relevant for the present, drawing informed connections between their study of past events and their bearing on the present.

Student Learning Outcome

Students will be able to analyze historical sources with appropriate attention to their various contexts.