

Westmont Names the Inaugural Director of the Houston Center and First Chief Diversity Officer



Westmont has named Dr. Carmel Saad, a psychology professor at the college since 2012, as the inaugural director of the Carol Houston Center for Justice, Reconciliation and Diversity and Westmont's first chief diversity officer.

"Carmel will play a vital role at Westmont," says President Gayle D. Beebe. "In our current social and economic climate, we see a growing need for broader conversations and initiatives that lead to deeper awareness and understanding. Healthy institutions are learning how to embrace the diversity of its members as part of our core competency as Christians and citizens. Research demonstrates that including diverse

viewpoints leads to richer discussions, more innovative products, more creative ideas, better decisions and stronger, healthier organizations.

The college began the process of establishing the Houston Center, appointing a chief diversity officer and strengthening our curriculum in 2020. In May 2023, Westmont trustees approved adding a requirement to enhance general education and bolster a sense of belonging among all people on campus. Saad was integrally involved in planning this change.

"We knew she was the ideal person to lead our initiatives. Carmel has earned high praise for her leadership and academic scholarship during her 12 years as a Westmont professor. She has developed deep and meaningful relationships with students, faculty and staff and has gained their trust. We have great confidence in her ability to work effectively with the community in developing skills needed to engage in challenging and effective conversations," Beebe said.



"I'm excited to interact with different constituencies, build bridges and shed light on how we can better engage in God's vision of a just, reconciling and diverse community," Saad says. "I'll explore how students, faculty and staff can build capacities to enhance cultural intelligence, mitigate the effects of bias and consider the perspectives of others. Through education, diversity training and vocational preparation, we aim to graduate students empowered to undertake difficult conversations from a more informed perspective of how to love others as ourselves, as Christ calls us to do. We'll emphasize the importance of working and growing alongside one another while appreciating and learning from our differences."

Saad's research, expertise and leadership have focused on implicit bias, the unconscious prejudices absorbed in childhood that persist into adulthood. She has been involved in several justice, reconciliation and diversity initiatives at Westmont for the past decade as well as at various local and national organizations, including the UC and CSU systems, Santa Barbara Unified School District, Santa Barbara Police Department, Santa Barbara Office of Probation and Cottage Hospital. The diversity of Westmont students has increased significantly since the mid-1980s, moving from 5 percent of students reporting as non-white in 1984 to the most diverse class ever in fall 2023 with 48 percent of students reporting as non-white, with more than 23 percent of students identifying as Latino or Hispanic.

"As our enrollment continues to diversify, we're committed to enhancing overall student belonging, retention and success," Saad says. "It's essential to strengthen our support and care for diverse students. As we equip all groups to become empathic global citizens, we must participate in honest and respectful conversations about difference and avoid inflaming or ignoring these discussions. In the midst of challenging dynamics, we strive for understanding, compassion and action. We must resist the tendency for ethnocentrism, which can lead to lack of civility and respect."



Saad will continue conducting research and consulting to learn what works best in fulfilling Westmont's mission. "Being steeped in the latest research and practice is essential," she says. "My background has provided a unique perspective. Coming from a traditional Egyptian family, I had to learn to navigate different cultural conventions and expectations inherent in Egyptian and American cultures. This inspired me to

become a cultural psychologist to better understand the experience of ethnic minorities in the United States. I also navigated gendered expectations of both cultural traditions. As an Egyptian-American woman and a cultural psychologist who specializes in implicit bias, I understand the importance of appreciating difference. I have lived in many contexts where I had to navigate the sometimes precarious experience of adapting to certain cultural environments while remaining authentic to my background, upbringing, and character."

Saad graduated from UC Santa Barbara and earned a Master of Arts and a doctorate in social and personality psychology from UC Davis. She taught at UC Davis, Napa Valley College and the University of the Pacific before coming to Westmont.

"We know that God calls us to appreciate all those who bear His image," Saad says. "And we know that those individuals come from every nation, tribe, people, and language (Revelation 9, NIV). We consider it essential to help our students understand and embrace the diversity of God's creation. I'm ready for this role and look forward to helping Westmont thrive."

Join me in welcoming Carmel to this new role and praying for God to bless her in this important leadership role.

Gayle D. Beebe, President