



THE WESTMONT WAY

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Every year, we welcome more than 400 new students to Westmont. During their education, we prepare them for a lifetime of leadership and service in every sphere of modern society. In between their arrival and their graduation, they encounter a host of academic and co-curricular experiences animated by our core commitments to the twin rails of rigorous academics and deep love for God and the five planks of our mission statement: our liberal arts curriculum, our Christian identity, our residential campus, our undergraduate focus and our global outlook. These enduring commitments have guided every new generation of board members, administrators, faculty, staff and students as we've pursued the next horizon for the college.

From our founding, Ruth Kerr and President Wallace Emerson were determined that Westmont cut a distinct path in the field of higher education. Crafting a vision for the college that would simultaneously offer a rigorous academic program while cultivating a deep love for God, Dr. Emerson set us on a track of educational excellence that has endured to this day. Centuries earlier, St. Augustine articulated a philosophy of education that anticipated Westmont's own commitments. Writing near the end of the 4th century, St. Augustine observed, "Usually even a non-Christian knows something about the Earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world, about the motion and orbit of the stars and even their size and relative positions ... this knowledge he holds to as being certain from reason and experience. Now it is a disgraceful thing for an infidel to hear a Christian speaking nonsense ... mistaken in fields which they themselves know well and therefore they become unwilling to read or hear about matters concerning the resurrection of the dead, the hope of eternal life, and the kingdom of heaven because of our own apparent foolishness."

How, then, do we craft an educational experience that prepares our graduates to lead and serve in every sphere of modern society while inspiring the admiration and confidence of all who inhabit the public square? We begin with our core and enduring commitments.



1. The Liberal Arts

Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, once observed that a liberal arts education provides the best possible preparation because it teaches us how to take discrete areas of knowledge and place them into a meaningful whole. The liberal arts teach us how to think. They teach us an approach to learning that invites us to see the interrelationship of all knowledge. They cultivate intellectual humility as we discover the wide, vast universe of human knowledge. This recognition invites a lifetime of learning.

By anchoring our mission to the liberal arts, we connect with a 2,500 year-history dating back to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. In the ancient world, the liberal arts were designed to provide a graduated curriculum that mirrored human development. It began with mastery of the verbal arts of grammar, logic and rhetoric followed by grasping the mathematical arts of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. The comprehensive curriculum unfolded in a sequential manner. From the study of grammar, we learn the right use of language; from logic, the right use of thought; and from rhetoric, how to put together the right use of language with the right use of thought to make compelling arguments that move society. From the study of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music, we learn higher-order thinking and the proportions and proportionality that help us rank competing commitments as we build social policies that lead to human flourishing.

The ancient world always studied the liberal arts as a means to something greater, training minds in particular subjects to transfer intellectual learning to addressing the great questions of life. Beginning with Clement of Alexandria (150-215), Christians considered the role and value of the liberal arts to be central in cultivating understanding of our individual life, our corporate responsibilities, our relationship to God and our ultimate quest for meaning and purpose. Over time, the purposes of a liberal arts education developed into a fourfold progression: the acquisition of language skill; the mastery of math skills; the consideration of the nature of ethics, the proper role of politics and the subjugation of our unruly passions; and the proper study of God.

Earlier, Aristotle emphasized that we should not look "...for the same measure of precision in all things, but for the level of precision appropriate to each discipline." The liberal arts illustrate how we learn the measure of truth appropriate to each category. Later in the 11th and early 12th century, Hugh of St. Victor amplified this understanding by showing that we can work out our salvation by combining a high view of the liberal arts with productive labor. He expands the original Greek and early church idea of the liberal arts beyond the 'philosophic arts' of Plato and Augustine and the 'practical arts' of Cicero by adding a third component: the 'productive arts.'

Today, the liberal arts curriculum still animates life on campus, but it has broadened to incorporate the newest areas of human learning, including the emergence of technology, data analytics, AI and machine learning (and the pending transition and displacement of humans by machines), innovation and entrepreneurship, moral and emotional intelligence, systems thinking, critical thinking, and integrative thinking that leads to creative problem-solving. We believe a Westmont education will give our graduates the capacity to sustain and integrate all these known and emerging challenges as we move deeper into the 21st century.



2. Our Christian Identity

A high view of Scripture animates Westmont's commitment to a robust Christian faith and belief that life-changing capacities result from an encounter with God and a winsome hope and confidence in a life beyond this life. The streams of thought that inform this outlook include biblical studies, philosophy, historical theology and philosophy of religion. These interacting areas of study allow us to consider the nature of faith, the right use of reason, the problem of evil and suffering, and how we ask and answer life's greatest questions. For Westmont, these intersecting realities come to a focal point in the life and teachings of Jesus and form the foundation that shapes our own Christian identity.

Everyone needs a fixed point by which to approach life. For the Christian, the life and teachings of Jesus and the efforts we expend to understand them form the most compelling starting point for navigating life's journey. As people committed to a life with God, we believe this process unfolds over time. Our educational enterprise plays a key role as we deepen our knowledge of God at the same time we broaden our outlook and understanding of all that life offers. In this way, people animated by faith and motivated by their intellect weave together a sacred mosaic of deeply held commitments that bring meaning and purpose to all we do.

But how do we gain knowledge of God that can guide and sustain us in this way? Augustine, Luther and Calvin emphasize the importance and primacy of Scripture. Thomas Aquinas emphasizes the right use of reason and the importance of sound doctrine. Blaise Pascal, the 17th century philosopher and mathematician elevates the role of reason by stating, "...if we submit everything to reason, our religion will be left with nothing mysterious or supernatural. If we offend the principles of reason our religion will be absurd and ridiculous." Ignatius, John Wesley, and later 19th and 20th century thinkers highlight the importance of an integrated approach to theological thinking that makes room for religious experiences by showing how they align with Scripture and the light of reason. All this intellectual and spiritual inquiry occurs in the life and context of the great faith communities of the church. These dynamic thinkers fortify the relevance of these testimonies as they articulate their understanding of Jesus's person and work throughout history.

The late 20th century classic work by Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries*, captures one of the most remarkable and beautiful expressions of this understanding. Pelikan creates a kaleidoscope of insight into the life of Jesus by identifying several key understandings that reflect how Christians have understood Jesus across time. Each example reminds us of the role great thinkers in the history of the church play in making the life and teachings of Jesus relevant to each age, preserving what is timeless while offering fresh insight into what is time-bound.



3. Our Residential Life

Our residential program nurtures the community where students develop the capacity for human flourishing. Through an integrated approach of academics and education for the whole person, we consolidate study and experiences into meaningful wholes. Richard Light makes a great case for this unique partnership when he asks the simple yet poignant question, "...if students are in class an average of 16 hours a week, what are they doing with the other 152 hours?"

At a broader level, cultural currents work against educating the whole person and our

deliberate efforts to craft a residential community. The rise of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th century elevated the individual above the community. Simone Weil and others raise important questions about what happens to a society—and even a whole civilization—when individuals lose track of their responsibilities by boldly asserting their individual rights. As a corrective, we want our students to learn how to think for themselves while they live for others. In this way, we begin to ask and answer what it means to belong to a community.

Communities form around shared understandings. They embody a particular way of seeing the world and reflect how we understand and interpret specific experiences. Communities identify values, articulate purposes and determine the role they will attempt to play in the wider affairs of the world.

At Westmont, we believe the residential experience helps our graduates understand the unique and enduring contribution made by mutual commitment to community. Friendships are forged across the most unlikely of circumstances because of the common context of our college community. As a result, we see into the lives and perspectives of our fellow residents and friends and gain a new perspective on the variety of priorities and circumstances that make up the global community.

Additionally, students forge mentoring relationships with faculty and staff that endure long after they graduate. Mentoring helps students experience the caring oversight of key professors who activate their excitement about chosen areas of study and even future careers. Students feel the warm embrace of a community that wants them to succeed not only in the classroom but in all areas of their life. Despite the reality that many of our students get over-committed to extra-curricular activities and service, these same commitments end up being the source of joy and growth that propel them to a life of leadership and service.

4. The Undergraduate Focus

We're often tempted to diminish the important decisions made during our undergraduate years. Culturally, we drift toward seeing 30 as the new 20, as if we could suspend 10 years of development and check back in after a period of wandering. Some have called this period an extended adolescence. Others have described it as a gradual uphill climb toward adulthood. But Meg Jay helps us see and understand the vital importance of this period.

In her landmark work, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter—and How to Make the Most of them Now*, Jay demonstrates that seven of the 10 most important decisions we make in life occur in our 20s—or we're laying the groundwork for them in our 20s. How do we pay attention to what matters most? She identifies key areas that help us learn to discern what we'll like best and take the job that will grow us the most. Pay attention to weak ties, those relationships beyond our circle of friends where a greater likelihood of career advancement rests. Reactivate latent dreams we have for ourselves. Focus not on how we look on social media but on what matters most to us in life. Live the narrative we want for ourselves. Begin to think about marriage by pursuing relationships with people we would want to marry. Pay attention to our partner's family. Exercise discipline and restraint. Pay attention to what we love and what we don't. Learn the difference between the highly structured world of academics and the highly adaptable world of adult life.

We face these, and other realities, during our time as an undergraduate. Educating



the whole person cultivates both a sense of the unfolding realities of our individual development as well as the growing opportunities available in our wider community. Together, we have to balance the life we long for with the life we're living.



5. A Global Outlook

The fifth and most unique plank of our mission statement focuses on our enduring commitment to cultivating a global outlook through off-campus programs. From our inception, Mrs. Kerr and Dr. Emerson envisioned a curriculum that included a commitment to the global community. But they could scarcely have imagined how the world would shrink as technology and travel grew.

Westmont provides truly pioneering work in global education. Our Cycle of Global Learning, first developed and then popularized by our own faculty, incorporates three distinct phases. First, the pre-trip seminar prepares students to enter a foreign culture. Then, the mentoring during the trip, when our professors travel with our students, helps them interpret their experiences. Recent research demonstrates the value and importance of interpreting key experiences and events while traveling abroad. We hear echoes of T. S. Eliot's famous line from *Four Quartets*, "...they had the experience, but they missed the meaning." Our study-abroad trips provide the experience and capture the meaning. But the third and most difficult part, and the unique insight and contribution made by our faculty, is the re-entry seminar. When students return to their family of origin, their friends and their host culture, they often feel alienated. The re-entry seminar helps our students bring the learning home and consolidate the important lessons that only result from traveling outside our own culture and discovering how to live, learn and think in a society different from our own.

More recently, professors from our Psychology Department have provided cutting-edge research and discovery in the area of implicit bias, the unconscious way we form prejudice against other individuals and groups. Our Cycle of Global Learning can address this bias, especially when combined with intake instruments, ongoing feedback and deliberate training and coaching.

All this effort reflects the larger priority of building a society and a global community that leads to human flourishing. Important help comes from a variety of sources, including Robert Wuthnow's excellent work, *Communities of Discourse*. This book considers why some societies succeed and others fail as they endure a variety of tensions and dislocations due to internal strife and external threat. He amplifies his conclusions by demonstrating the role of eight key areas

- Social conditions.
- Economic conditions.
- Political systems and ideologies.
- Religious systems and ideologies.
- Attitudes and definitions of deviance.
- Cultural and intellectual productivity.
- The role and responsibility of the military.
- Legal and judicial institutions.

Although Wuthnow provides enormous and complex detail, his greater goal is helping us make sense of other cultures and societies.

More recently, the work of Erin Meyer in *The Culture Map* distills our thinking into cross-cultural comparisons along eight primary lines.

- Communicating: explicit (low-context) vs. implicit (high context).
- Evaluating: direct negative feedback vs. indirect negative feedback.
- Persuading: deductive vs. inductive.
- Leading: egalitarian vs. hierarchical.
- Deciding: consensual vs. top down.
- Trusting: task vs. relationship
- Disagreeing: confrontational vs. avoid confrontation.
- Scheduling: structured vs. flexible.

Between Wuthnow's eight spheres and Meyer's eight comparables, we receive insight into how cultures function and how we can understand the dynamic interplay of their many parts. By integrating these different spheres into a meaningful whole, we begin to understand why countries and civilizations differ so dramatically throughout history. As societies migrated in increasing numbers to the cities of Europe and then America, urbanization, immigration and industrialization played an increasingly interactive role in producing the social and cultural changes that remain to this day. By looking back, we gain better insight into the emerging realities fueled by technology, artificial intelligence and the social dislocation underway as a result of machine learning. Ultimately, we hope that by assisting our students to understand these elements, we'll prepare them for a life of leadership and service in every sphere of society.



Conclusion

Together, the twin rails and the five planks provide the guiding framework for our mission as a college. As we move deeper into the 21st century, simmering challenges to our core values and growing questions about the relevance of a liberal arts education only heighten our responsibility to provide thoughtful and compelling rationale for what we do. The proof always lies in the outcome, and our graduates continue to flourish in every sphere of society, providing both competency in their chosen field and the character and moral orientation to sustain them in their life and work. As more and more Fortune 500 companies recognize and celebrate the strength of a liberal arts curriculum, the wide and growing appeal of a Westmont degree will become more evident.

In 2027, we'll celebrate our 90th anniversary. By college standards, we're young. By business standards, we're old. Caught between these competing timelines, we face the ongoing challenge to balance the budget year in and year out while we grow the financial strength of the college to endure any and every challenge that might come. We remain deeply committed to the unique approach we pursue at Westmont. We also recognize it as the most cost-sensitive way to provide education. We began by wondering what it means to describe a student as educated. We finish by affirming that an educated student possesses the character to face every challenge in life and the intellectual and emotional preparation to respond with wisdom and grace as they confront it. The wisdom and vision of our founders remains our guiding light today.