The Purpose of General Education

Academic Program. In keeping with our overall philosophy of education, our academic program is designed to foster intellectual vitality, Christian character, and commitment to service that will last a lifetime. Crucial to this goal is providing our students with an education that is both deep and broad. In the context of a major, students learn the discipline of submitting to a particular methodology and of mastering a specialized body of content. It is in their general education that they acquire the tools for relating this specialized knowledge to other realms of understanding, to their own lives, and to the world around them.

Major Program. Each student, by the end of the sophomore year, will choose a major program. (The various major programs are outlined later in this catalogue.) The primary purpose of a major is to provide students with the experience of going beneath the surface of a field of learning. Though the particular skills of "going deep" may vary from discipline to discipline, the overall experience inculcates such broadly applicable virtues as patience, persistence, sustained attention, and awareness of complexity and ambiguity.

General Education. In the tradition of the liberal arts, Westmont's academic program requires students to set their major programs of study within the larger context of General Education. The General Education framework ensures that a student's major program will be supported by the skills, the breadth of knowledge, the strategies of inquiry, and the practices that will enable them to mature in wisdom throughout their lives and to apply their learning effectively in the world around them. As a liberal arts college in the Christian tradition, we ground our pursuit of learning and wisdom in the context of God's revelation—manifested in the scriptures and in the world around us, and apprehended through reason, observation, experimentation, and the affections. Through the General Education program, students develop the necessary contextual background, concepts, vocabulary, and skills to support their exploration of these various avenues to understanding the world.

In addition to developing knowledge and skills, our general education curriculum at Westmont seeks to inspire students to become constructive agents of redemption in a diverse and complex world. Thus, the General Education program provides opportunities for students to encounter a variety of viewpoints, cultures, and languages. Finally, we offer students the opportunity to practice their learning in the context of concrete experiences that facilitate the acquisition of wisdom, empathy and practical expertise.

An Introduction to General Education

Westmont students grow in ways that reflect the rich diversity of God's created order. But students are nourished by a common grounding that provides a shared context. The General Education program, in the tradition of the liberal arts, Westmont's academic program requires students to set their major programs of study within the larger context of General Education. As they grow in faith, students become rooted in the canon of the Old and New Testaments and in theological understanding. As they grow in skill, students cultivate their ability to write cogently, to reason mathematically, to converse in a language other than their native tongue, and to be fit stewards of their bodies. As they grow in knowledge, students increase their ability to grasp world history, to read and analyze discerningly from a Christian perspective, and to distinguish truths and values as they think through issues of eternal significance.

Recognizing the breadth of their heritage, Westmont students explore a variety of the branches of human knowledge and inquiry. Such exploration necessarily involves choice. In choosing courses, students will encounter some disciplines and not others. But the array of options within the general education program ensures that in reaching out to a wide variety of specific branches, each student will grasp something of the rich diversity of human learning as an organic whole. By becoming familiar with the vocabularies and types of questions asked in several disciplines, students equip themselves to be members of an increasingly global and diverse intellectual community.

Students encounter their heritage through courses labeled Common Contexts, Common Inquiries, and Common Skills. Each Common Contexts class grounds students in a body of material and explicitly invites them into an understanding of the Christian liberal arts tradition. Each Common Inquiries class empowers students to explore the knowledge, methodologies, and modes of inquiry of a given discipline. Each Common Skills class encourages students to develop their verbal, quantitative, or physical dexterity.

As they grow deeper in the common ground they share with other members of the community, Westmont students also master the methods and knowledge of their chosen majors. But a Christian liberal arts education is more than an intellectual exercise; students must incarnate their emerging maturity in competent and compassionate action. Living out what one has learned not only embodies the liberal arts tradition, which has always sought to produce informed and capable citizens, but also the Christian tradition, in which faith is demonstrated through works.

Reflecting the rich diversity of creation, such blossoming may take many different forms. It may emerge from and be demonstrated within the student's major field of study, or within academic work outside the major. Students demonstrate the capability not just to know but to do, not just to study but to perform, not just to speak clearly but to communicate cross-culturally, not just to recognize right but to enact justice. A student completing general education and a major field of study leaves Westmont ready to live out the good news of Christ and the empowerment of education. However difficult it may be to acquire, a Christian liberal arts education exists to be given away, for free, in a lifetime of competent, compassionate service to God and to others.

An Overview of General Education

A Minimum grade of "D-" at Westmont is required to satisfy General Education Requirements.

I. Common Contexts

Common Contexts courses must be taken at Westmont College or at an approved institution similar to those in the Christian College Consortium.

A. Biblical and Theological Canons
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
1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value
2. World History in Christian Perspective

II. Common Inquiries

Courses satisfying each of the 8 categories

A. Reading Imaginative Literature
B. Exploring the Physical Sciences
C. Exploring the Life Sciences
D. Reasoning Abstractly
E. Performing & Interpreting the Arts
F. Thinking Globally
G. Thinking Historically
H. Understanding Society

III. Common Skills

A. Three writing-intensive or speech-intensive courses:
   1. Writing for the Liberal Arts
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2. Life and Literature of the New Testament
3. Introduction to Christian Doctrine

B. Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts
1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value
2. World History in Christian Perspective

II. Common Inquiries

Courses satisfying each of the 8 categories

A. Reading Imaginative Literature
B. Exploring the Physical Sciences
C. Exploring the Life Sciences
D. Reasoning Abstractly
E. Performing & Interpreting the Arts
F. Thinking Globally
G. Thinking Historically
H. Understanding Society

III. Common Skills

A. Three writing-intensive or speech-intensive courses:
   1. Writing for the Liberal Arts
   2. Writing/speech within the major


3. Writing/speech outside the major
B. Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning
C. Modern / Foreign Languages
D. Physical Education (four, one unit courses) Physical fitness for life plus three activity courses

IV. Competent and Compassionate Action

A. Complete one of the following three options:
1. Productions and Presentations
2. Research
3. Integrating the Major Discipline

B. Complete one of the following two options:
1. Serving Society; Enacting Justice
2. Communicating Cross-Culturally

The Components of General Education

I. Common Contexts

Courses must be taken at Westmont College or at an approved institution similar to those in the Christian College Consortium. In order to obtain the development benefits of the General Education Program, the general education program is designed to confer and to insure timely progress toward graduation, it is strongly recommended that students complete the Common Contexts requirements by the end of the second year.

Transfer students must complete one course at Westmont from subcategory A. Biblical and Theological Canons and one course at Westmont from subcategory B. Introduction to the Christian Liberal Arts for each full year of attendance at Westmont, or complete all five course requirements in subcategories A. and B. Transfer students are encouraged to complete the entire requirement in order to receive the full benefit of the General Education Program. Please note: Reapplicants who originally entered Westmont as first-year students are not considered transfer students regardless of the length of time they were away from Westmont or the number of units they "transfer" back to Westmont on their return.

A. Biblical and Theological Canons

These courses increase students’ biblical and theological literacy, providing them with essential resources for the integration of faith and learning throughout the curriculum.

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

The two requirements in this section introduce students early in their time at Westmont to the nature and purpose of a Christian Liberal Arts education. By introducing students to the Christian liberal arts through a particular disciplinary or methodological lens, these requirements all are intended to draw students explicitly into the questions and the concerns that we hope will pervade their entire education at Westmont. These themes include, among others: an exploration of what it means to be human; what it means to live a good life; and what it means to pursue justice as a citizen of both this world and the Kingdom of God. As a result of having fulfilled these requirements, students will have an appreciation for the development of the Christian Liberal Arts tradition. In addition, they will be on their way to developing categories of critical evaluation, sensitivity to historical context, empathic imagination, and other essential capacities of a liberally educated Christian.

1. Philosophical Reflections on Truth and Value
2. World History in Christian Perspective

Courses satisfying this requirement explore world history from a Christian perspective, and include critical discussion of the term "Christian perspectives" as a concept whose definition is subject to interpretation. Geographically comprehensive and chronologically wide-ranging, the courses emphasize the historical rootedness of all traditions—the Christian tradition included. By challenging cultural stereotypes, the courses help students develop a thoughtful and informed approach to other cultures.

II. Common Inquiries

Common Inquiries courses will, collectively, seek to introduce students to a range of methodological approaches that one might employ in the quest for knowledge. These courses give particular attention to various ways of acquiring knowledge and evaluating information and incorporate appropriate consideration of the resources and implications of information technology. Courses may be either disciplinary (taught by one professor with demonstrated competence in that methodological approach) or interdisciplinary (team taught).

Students take courses to satisfy each of the following eight categories. A student may elect, as a one-time option, to use one qualified course to satisfy two Common Inquiries requirements. A student who wishes to use AP, A-level, or IB credit to satisfy more than three Common Inquires requirements may do so by passing an appropriate advanced course and filing a petition with the Registrar.

A. Reading Imaginative Literature
B. Exploring the Physical Sciences
C. Exploring the Life Sciences
D. Reasoning Abstractly
E. Performing and Interpreting the Arts

Courses satisfying this requirement introduce students to basic properties and principles of matter, examining structure and function in elementary physical systems traditionally studied by physicists and chemists. Students should come to appreciate both creative and evaluative questions of truth and values. Students in these courses should recognize how imaginative literature honors the complexity of human experience. Further, by encouraging the practice of compassion by imagining the other, the course involves students in ways of knowing that are inherently ethical.

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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.

Courses satisfying this requirement develop students' understanding of the fine arts and performing arts, including music, visual arts, theatre, or dance. Such courses develop and expand perceptual faculties, develop physical practices integral to the art form, and explore the critical principles which guide artists in the area.
F. Thinking Globally. Courses satisfying this requirement introduce cultural, religious, or economic issues and traditions from a comparative global perspective to equip students to be informed agents of redemption and justice in the world. Such a perspective entails encountering various “ways of thinking” (other world views) that are different from the student’s own, and exposure to a range of methodologies that extend beyond Western/North American approaches.

G. Thinking Historically. Courses satisfying this requirement develop students’ awareness and appreciation for the particulars of time and place, a sense of the complex process of change and continuity over time, the ability to work critically with a range of primary and secondary historical texts, and appreciation for the art of constructing historical narrative. By studying 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 interpretive and historiographic discussion; have practice in constructing a historical narrative; understand the complexity of historical change.

H. Understanding Society. Courses in this area develop students’ understanding of social phenomena analyzing and explaining a wide and varied range of human behavior and social institutions and practices. Students should recognize the dynamic interplay among individuals, societal infrastructure, and public policy intention and resultant activities. Students should also understand the processes of the political economy, the nature of technology and innovation as social phenomena, and the interaction of private enterprise and the public sector. Courses provide exposure to a breadth of literature regarding models or theories that explain social phenomena. Students will acquire competence to evaluate these phenomena through observation, data collection, and quantitative and qualitative analysis. Students should reflect on the implications of contemporary technological advances and their impacts on personal relationships, research methodologies, the inquiry process, and the accumulation and dissemination of new knowledge.

III. Common Skills

Each Common Skills class encourages students to develop their verbal, quantitative, or physical dexterity. Students in these courses are also expected to demonstrate competence in a wide range of contemporary information/technology processes. To the extent that it is possible, students are encouraged to fulfill their skills requirements in the context of a course in the major or a course taken to satisfy another general education requirement. Until the requirements have been satisfied, it is recommended that students complete at least one Writing/Speech Intensive and one Physical Education course per year.

A. Three Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Courses. Students develop their communication skills at Westmont by taking at least three courses that emphasize writing fluently or speaking clearly and effectively. Such writing-intensive or speech-intensive courses encourage students to develop their abilities to articulate information, ideas, and convictions both in written and oral discourse. Students are expected to be able to communicate effectively to a wide range of audiences, within the academic, the church, and the public. The Writer’s Corner enables students at all levels to discuss writing strategies individually with peer consultants.

1. Writing for the Liberal Arts. All students should take a writing-intensive course during their first year at Westmont. Many students will fulfill this requirement by taking English 2: Composition for the Liberal Arts. Students with qualifying test scores (e.g., ACT, SAT WR II) may fulfill this requirement by taking a writing-intensive course offered by any department.

2. Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Course within the Major. All students take at least one writing-intensive or speech-intensive course in their major.

3. Writing-Intensive or Speech-Intensive Course outside the Major. Students completing a single major take a writing-intensive or speech-intensive course in any field outside that major. Students completing a double major take a writing-intensive or speech-intensive course in both majors.

B. Quantitative and Analytical Reasoning. Since many phenomena in our world can best be understood through quantitative and analytic methods, students should develop the ability to interpret, evaluate and communicate quantitative ideas. Central to courses satisfying this requirement is: the use of mathematical models for physical or social systems or; the understanding and communication of numeric data including the computation and interpretation of summative statistics and the presentation and interpretation of graphical representations of data. A core focus of the course is the explicit study of quantitative and analytic methods, or, alternatively, the reflective use of quantitative methods as a tool.

C. Modern/Foreign Languages. Westmont encourages students to continue developing their fluency in a language other than their native tongue by requiring students to complete one semester of college language beyond the level of the two-year entrance requirement to the college. Alternatively, having met the entrance requirement in one language, they may take one semester of college-level study in another language. A course in any modern spoken language (e.g. Spanish, French, German) or an ancient language (e.g. Greek or Hebrew) is accepted as fulfilling this requirement. Students are exempt from this requirement if they pass an examination demonstrating the equivalent of three semesters of college language study or present evidence of a primary language other than English to the Records Office.

D. Physical Education. The physical education program is designed to provide instruction and exposure to fitness, skill-based and leisure activities. All students are required to take Fitness for Life and three 1-unit physical activity courses. A wellness-based foundation is laid in Fitness for Life. The additional three activity courses provide reinforcement for a lifetime of physical activity. Transfer students must complete one PE Activity course for each full year they are enrolled at Westmont, or complete all four (4) PE Activity course requirements, including PEA-032 Fitness for Life. Please note: Reapplicants who originally entered Westmont as first-year students are not considered transfer students regardless of the length of time they were away from Westmont or the number of units they “transfer” back to Westmont on their return.

IV. Competent and Compassionate Action

The expectation that students will put their education into action may be fulfilled in a variety of ways, many of which may be part of the student’s major.

All students will complete one of the following three options at an advanced level:

A. Productions and Presentations. Participation in a course that provides a substantial opportunity for creative production and performance or presentation. Upper-division courses in a wide variety of disciplines provide suitable occasions for students to complete a major project.

B. Research. Any course or project with a substantial research component may be undertaken to satisfy this requirement. The associated activities should include identification of a problem, question or issue; formulation of a question or hypothesis; development of an appropriate methodology; review of the relevant literature; experiment; evidence-gathering, or argument construction and evaluation; and report of the findings in an appropriate form.

C. Integrating the Major Discipline. Any course or project in the student’s major that has a substantial integrative component may be taken to satisfy this requirement. Such courses involve students in reflection on the discipline—how its diverse parts form a coherent whole and how the discipline interacts with the Christian faith and with the whole of a Liberal Arts education.

In addition to the above, all students also complete one of the following two options:

A. Serving Society: Enacting Justice. Students will participate in a course service project, or an internship that includes significant involvement in responding to social issues. The service project should be explicitly integrated into the academic content of the course. A course or internship fulfilling this requirement will raise students’ awareness of issues of justice grounded in social class, gender, ethnicity or human disability; the environment; or the impact of technology. This should invite students to examine their own presuppositions and to develop their skills in their exercise of charity and
B. Communicating Cross-Culturally. Courses or programs satisfying this component involve an extended cross-cultural setting that is explicitly integrated into the course or program’s goals and content. This requirement could include an off-campus program that involves significant encounters with people from other cultures, in which the encounters are designed primarily to facilitate mutual understanding, dialogue, and appreciation. The requirement may also be met through an on-campus course providing significant opportunities for encounters with—in addition to learning about—people from other cultures in a context designed to facilitate mutual understanding and appreciation.